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**THE ONE
STRAND
RIVER**
AND OTHER
FAIRY STORIES
BY
MRS. H.F. HALL

DAVID NUTT-THE SIGN OF THE 'PHENIX' LONG ACRE



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FAIRY TALES

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THE HENWIFE IS STOPPED AT THE CHURCH GATE

Frontispiece

THE
ONE
STRAND
RIVER,

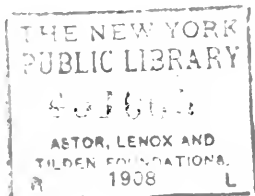
AND
OTHER
FAIRY
TALES.

By

MRS H. F. HALL.



PUBLISHED BY DAVID NUTT at the SIGN of the PHOENIX.
LONG ACRE.
LONDON. 1903.



TO ALL
“HIGH SCHOOL GRANDCHILDREN”
ESPECIALLY TO
THE FOUR WITH WHOM I AM IMMEDIATELY
CONCERNED

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The One Strand River

“Grey Goose and Gander
Waft your wings together,
Carry the Good King's Daughter
Over the One Strand River.”

Nursery Rhyme.

THE Witch of the Woods was sitting by her cottage fire one raw autumn evening, when a timid knock at her door caused her to rise and open it. There stood a forlorn little figure, which she at once recognised as that of the King's daughter, but in such a plight as surely no Princess was ever seen before. Her gown of sky-blue satin was torn into strips by the brambles and splashed with mud ; one little foot was covered only by a tattered silken stocking, and the shoe on the other had lost its silver heel. Her face was stained with tears, and her golden hair, all uncurled by the heavy

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dew, was hanging in dishevelled locks over her shoulders ; altogether, she was a pitiful spectacle.

“ Who are you, and what do you want ? ” said the Witch crossly, for she disliked unlucky people. “ We harbour no tramps here.”

“ I am the good King’s daughter,” faltered the Princess, ready to cry at the harsh tone. “ His enemies have captured the Palace, put him in prison, and turned me out to beg my bread. I have been walking all day, trying to find my way to the next kingdom, but I lost the path in the forest, and now I cannot go a step further—I am so tired. I saw the light of your fire, and thought I might find refuge beside it.”

“ Come in, then,” grunted the Witch. “ You may rest here to-night, at least. To-morrow I will see what I can do with you : I am in want of a farm-girl, and you may serve as well as another.” So saying, she dragged a wooden bench up to the fire, put bread and milk on the table, and went out to shut up her horse and cow for the night.

At first Princess Arminell was too weary to

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do anything but enjoy the rest and warmth ; but presently she realised that she was ravenously hungry, and turned to the food on the table. Scarcely had she tasted the milk when a melancholy wail from the chimney corner made her start, and she saw a lean hungry-looking white cat come out and rub himself ingratiatingly against her feet.

“ Poor thing, you are as hungry as I am,” said the Princess, putting the bowl down on the floor. The cat required no coaxing, but lapped with such good-will that soon not a drop remained.

“ I shall find this bread dry eating, I fear,” said the Princess rather ruefully, as she broke the barley cake ; but before she had eaten a morsel a gaunt grey gander, followed by a lame goose, waddled in at the open door and began hungrily to pick up imaginary grains of corn from the earthen floor. The tender heart of the Princess could not withstand the appeal, and without considering her own needs she crumbled the bread before them, and saw it disappear as rapidly as the milk had done.

“ You have supped well,” said the Witch,

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entering suddenly as the geese scuttled away behind the wood pile, and the cat curled himself up once more in his warm corner. "That is the worst of young people—they are always so greedy. Well, there will be all the less for your breakfast. You may sleep on that bench by the fire, for you must wake betimes."

The unwelcome guest slept soundly in spite of her hunger and her hard narrow bed; and at daybreak she was aroused by the Witch, who sourly bade her take off her spoilt finery and put on a short gown of coarse grey frieze, with a blue linsey apron. "These are what my last servant wore," she said, "and here is her cap: you can tuck away that ridiculous mane of hair under it, unless you prefer to cut it off, which would be better. There is a pair of wooden shoes that will just fit you. Will you throw away those torn stockings, or will you try to darn them?"

"Darn! what is that?" said the Princess, looking at her feet with an air of perplexity. "I always put on a new pair of stockings every day, and I have never seen wooden shoes before."

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"You will find no new stockings here," snapped the Witch, "and you must put on those shoes or go barefoot. I can't do with fine-lady airs in my house. Dress yourself, while I water the horse."

The poor little Princess was on the point of crying, when the funny side of the matter struck her and she laughed instead. Taking off the tattered stockings, she looked round for some means of washing the mud from her feet, and seeing none, followed her ungracious hostess into the yard.

"Can I wash myself?" she said.

"Here's the pump," grunted the Witch, who was filling a pail with water for her old horse. The process of pumping was a great astonishment to the Princess, but she watched with interest, and presently tried the experiment for herself, and soon had a pail full of water, in which she washed her face and hands, and bathed her blistered feet, after which she put on the clumsy shoes. She then braided her hair, with the aid of a broken comb which she found in the kitchen, and tucked it under the mob-cap of gaily-flowered chintz. Then she looked at her

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reflection in the trough, and laughed again until the thought of her father brought the tears once more to her eyes.

“I am glad you are so merry,” said the Witch, coming out of the stable with the empty pail in her hand. “You should work all the better. We can’t do with idlers here. Tony the cat gets nothing to eat but the rats and mice which he catches in the barn; the geese pick up their own living in the field, and the pigs in the forest; and you, too, must work for your living, or go elsewhere. Can you milk the cow?”

“Oh, yes, if you will tell me where the milk-pump is,” said the Princess.

“Is the girl mad?” demanded the Witch. “What do you mean?”

“When you spoke of watering the horse, you gave it water—I watched you,” protested Arminell. “I thought I must milk the cow by giving it milk.”

“A pretty bargain of a farm-girl I’ve got!” said the old woman in disgust. “Can you do *anything*?”

“I—I don’t know,” hesitated the Princess, who had up to that moment considered herself

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rather an accomplished person. "I can dance——"

"In wooden shoes?" asked the Witch scoffingly.

"I can embroider——"

"But you can't darn stockings."

"I can sing."

"So can Tony, but I don't care to hear him," growled the Witch. "Can you make bread?"

"*Make* bread? I always thought it grew," said Arminell, who had been accustomed to have her wants supplied without asking where things came from. The Witch fairly snorted with disgust.

"And if I tell you to find the eggs that the hens have laid, I suppose you'll be climbing the trees to look for the nests," she said. "To think that a girl of your age should be so ignorant! Well, I can't begin to teach you at *my* time of life, you'll have to mind the pigs—that's all you're fit for! Here are bread and cheese and cold bacon; don't eat it all at once, you'll get nothing more till supper. If you want anything to drink, here's a tin mug, and there's the pump. You

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drank all the milk last night. Now take that spiked stick, open the sty, and drive the pigs into the wood. Mind you take them where they can get their fill of acorns and beech-mast, and take care not to let them stray, or I will beat you well."

The Princess obediently opened the gate of the sty and, as seven well-grown black porkers tumbled out, followed at a more leisurely pace by their portly mother, she drove them through the farmyard and along a narrow track that led into the depths of the forest beyond. She felt as if it were all a dream, and that she must soon awaken. Could it really be she, the King's daughter, who had never stirred a step in her life before without attendance, who was herding pigs in the lonely forest, half-starved, and dressed like a peasant? Still, the novelty was delightful, the morning air was fresh and pleasant, the sun shone here and there between the trees, the rough clothing was at least clean and warm, and far better suited for country wear than her court dress; and when at last the pigs stopped and began to root about for acorns, she sat down on a tree

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stump and ate the coarse food in her apron pocket with an appetite which surprised herself. Presently a rustling attracted her attention, and looking round she saw a procession of three, sedately approaching over the dry leaves. First came Tony the cat, his tail held stiffly erect, then the grey goose, and last of all the gander, walking with careful steps and necks at full stretch. The cat, without waiting for an invitation, sprang into her lap and curled himself up contentedly, and the geese joined the pigs in their search for food.

"I have no milk to-day, Tony, but here is a piece of cheese," said Arminell, comforted by finding a friend at hand. To her amazement the cat spoke in reply.

"Thank you, Princess, but I will not rob you again. Last night I begged from you just to see if you had a kind heart and could think of others in your own need ; now it is my turn to help you. In that hollow tree is a large store of honeycomb, which the bees have left ; and in the copse beyond are ripe blackberries for the gathering. In a week or two there will be hazel nuts and chestnuts

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if you like them ; and if you *could* fancy a young rabbit——”

“Oh, no, thank you !” said the Princess hastily, “I couldn’t cook it, you know, and I can’t eat it raw. But I am very fond of bread and honey, and I shall like the nuts and blackberries better than anything else.”

“Then you won’t starve,” said Tony. “The pigs will give you no trouble at present, but when the snow comes they will get wild and run away from you. If you lose them, the Witch will have no scruple in turning you out into the snow as she did her last servant, who nearly died of cold before she found her way to the next farm—she was a stout country girl, too.”

“You make me afraid,” said the Princess, turning pale ; “whatever shall I do if they stray ?”

“Never fear, we will help you,” said the cat. “We would have helped her, if she had done anything to deserve it ; but she lamed Grey Goose by kicking her, and she would not let me sleep on her apron ; she said she didn’t like cats. Didn’t like cats,

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indeed! I didn't like her, but I wasn't rude enough to say so."

"I love all animals," said Arminell dreamily. "At home I have seven cats and four dogs, and an aviary with over a hundred birds—I wonder who cares for them now? But I always wanted to go out into the woods and fields to see the wild things—you must tell me all about them."

"All birds are good," said Tony, with a gleam in his green eyes, "but the wild ones have most flavour. At least I have heard so," he added hastily, washing his face in order to hide its guilty expression.

The Princess was not listening, fortunately, and presently he began calling her attention to the squirrels playing overhead, and the rabbits which now and then darted out between the trees. The day passed peacefully, and, when the sun set, the pigs allowed themselves to be driven back to their sty without trouble. The Witch counted them up, but said nothing to Arminell, only gave her supper and showed her a tiny attic where she could sleep.

Several weeks passed, and the Princess

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got used to her new life. The weather was fine, though it grew daily colder ; the fresh air, plain food, and early hours made her strong and active, the pigs continued tractable, the Witch was not actively unkind, and the cat proved himself the most charming and attentive of companions. If it had not been for the uncertainty about her father's fate she could have been quite happy. One morning, however, when she drove the pigs out, she found the ground all white with snow, and the effect on her little flock was disastrous. As soon as they got out of sight of the cottage they squealed, kicked up their heels, and fled in eight several directions. She endeavoured to follow up the old sow, who would, she thought, be the first to flag, but in a short time she had completely lost both the sow's track, and her own bearings, and found herself in a part of the forest quite unknown to her.

In utter despair she sank down in the snow and cried for sheer helplessness. Suddenly four padded feet alighted on her shoulder, and a velvety head with bristling whiskers rubbed against her cheek.

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"Never say die, Princess," purred a familiar voice in her ear, "I'll fetch the pigs home before nightfall, never fear! Now suppose we enjoy ourselves a little. Here is a snug thicket where the snow has been kept off by the trees, there is a heap of dry brushwood, and in a hole under this tree is a squirrel's hoard of nuts. You have a tinder-box in your pocket; let us make a bonfire and roast chestnuts."

"That sounds delightful," said Arminell, drying her tears and beginning to build her fire with a skill which would have amazed her Court ladies if they could have seen her. "Hadn't we better look on the ground for chestnuts and not rob the squirrel?"

"Oh, *he* won't mind," said Tony, "I came round this way yesterday to see him, and he—well—in fact, he had just died suddenly. No, it really wasn't I—I assure you I don't *like* squirrel—it was a weasel. So we may just as well eat his nuts."

The fire burned brightly, the chestnuts were delicious; Grey Goose and Gander came waddling up in a great hurry to claim a share of the feast, and the swineherd had

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nearly forgotten her duties when the gathering dusk alarmed her.

"The pigs have not come back, Tony!" she cried.

"They soon will," he said coolly, and climbing swiftly into the tallest tree at hand, he lifted up his voice in a shrill yell. It was answered on all sides by a wild chorus of miaows, followed by squeaks and grunts in every conceivable pitch.

The pigs came rushing back from all directions, each pursued by half a dozen wild cats, whose eyes gleamed ferociously in the shadows of the forest. The cats all stopped and slunk away on seeing the fire, but the pigs never slackened their pace until they reached the old sow, who had been the first to return, and who now lay panting at Arminell's feet. They were driven home without difficulty, and though the Witch eyed them suspiciously she could find no cause for complaint.

The next few days they were more subdued, but about a week later they broke away once more, and, after long searching, Arminell saw them gathered together at the top of an inaccessible wall of crags which bounded the

The One Strand River 15

forest on one side. How they had reached such a height she could not imagine, and it was impossible to climb up to them. She looked for her faithful counsellor and found him, as usual, at her heels.

"I can't help you this time, Princess," he said. "Never mind, let us make a fire and wait for Grey Gander."

After a long interval Grey Gander waddled up, with his lame wife limping painfully behind. At first he seemed quite indifferent to the state of affairs, and occupied himself industriously in preening his feathers. At last, however, when things seemed desperate, he shook himself, flapped his wings solemnly three times, gave one loud quack, and went to sleep.

Presently a noise was heard overhead, and a flock of wild geese surrounded the pigs on the crag, pecking at their eyes, flapping their wings about their stupid heads, and finally driving them in utter confusion down the rocks until the Princess could once more collect them and drive them back to their sty.

That night the Witch was in a very bad

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temper and scowled at Arminell's return as if she were disappointed at having no cause for complaint. After supper she said to her, "To-morrow I go a long journey. In my absence you must guard the house, and you can employ yourself in killing the goose and gander and plucking them, so that I can cook them when I return. At the same time you may tie a stone to the cat's neck and drown him in the trough ; he grows lazy and catches no mice."

Arminell retreated to her attic in mute horror, and spent the night in wakefulness. When she came down in the morning the Witch was gone, and the three friends were gathered together in a melancholy group on the doorstep.

"Oh, my dears, what am I to do ? Do advise me," she cried, sitting down beside them and gathering them as best she could into her arms.

"There is only one thing to do, and that is—run away," said the cat. "The Witch is in league with the Good King's enemies, and all she seeks is an excuse for driving you back into their hands. Only two ways of

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escape are possible : up the crags, which I fear you cannot climb, or across the One Strand River. Any other way will bring you into her power again."

"What is the One Strand River, and how can we get there?" asked Arminell.

"It is the northern boundary of your father's kingdom, and lies a long day's walk from here," answered the cat. "People call it the One Strand River because the further shore is hidden by a thick bank of fog which no boat has ever been known to enter without coming to grief, and so the ignorant country folk believe that it has no other strand. Still, it has been crossed once, and may be again. As to how we can reach it—that is easy if the Witch has left her horse in the stable, and I think she has, for she has other ways of taking long journeys."

The horse was quickly harnessed into the light cart that the Witch used for her marketing, and Arminell with her friends got in and drove off at a good pace in the direction shown by the cat. For a long time no word was spoken, but at last the cat said: "Princess, do you hear anything?"

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"Nothing," she said, "but the wind rustling through the trees."

He was silent, but presently he asked again : "Princess, do you hear anything?"

"I hear a faint, far-off sound like running water."

"It is well," said the cat, "but it is still far away," and he shook the reins between his teeth to urge the old horse to still greater speed. An hour later, he asked once more : "Princess, do you hear anything?"

"I hear the river very clearly," said the Princess, "and behind us I hear the sound of little hoofs."

"That is the Witch riding on her black goat," said Tony, "and she will soon overtake us. We must get down and turn the horse's head homeward, while we hide among the trees; when she meets him returning she may think we have already crossed the river. It is our only chance."

In a moment it was done. The horse set off at a smart trot on the homeward journey, with the empty cart rattling at his heels, while the Princess hid herself and her three companions beneath the overhanging branches

The One Strand River 19

of a holly tree. Presently they heard the Witch's exclamations of anger as she met the cart, and soon they saw her between the leaves riding slowly by and casting sharp glances on either side.

"She will go right down to the river," whispered Tony ; "we must not stir until she returns."

A long wait followed, but at last they heard her riding quickly back, beating the goat angrily with her switch and muttering to herself. When at last the sound of the goat's hoofs had died away again the cat said, "Now we must hurry on, or we shall scarcely cross the river before nightfall, and she will return again in the morning."

They crept from their hiding-place, and Arminell hastened down the path which led to the river, with the cat in her arms and the goose and gander alternately running and flying behind her. In a very short time they had reached the shelving banks of the One Strand River, but to the Princess their case seemed as desperate as ever, for no bridge spanned it nor was there a boat to be seen on the shore. The river flowed by with a

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swift, steady motion, and the eye failed to penetrate its depth, while the width was, as the cat had said, impossible to guess because of the thick mist that covered the further side.

“You do not trust your friends even yet, Princess,” said the cat, as if he read her thoughts. “Here is a felled tree that the wood-cutters have left; it may serve as a raft if you do not fear wetting your feet. If you can roll it down to the water Grey Goose and Gander can draw you across.”

The log was easily rolled down until one end of it was in the river, and the Princess paused again, saying, “What shall we do for tow-ropes?”

“Can you tear your apron into strips?” said the cat.

“It is too strong to tear,” said Arminell, “but I can do better than that.” She pulled off her cap, unbound her hair, which fell nearly to the hem of her short dress, and with the wood-cutter’s axe, which was lying on the ground, she cut off two long golden tresses, which were quickly tied round the wings of the goose and gander, and the ends

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secured to the tree. Then she took her place on the unsteady raft, pushing off with her foot, while the cat sprang on her shoulder crying—

“Grey Goose and Gander
Waft your wings together.
Carry the Good King’s Daughter
Over the One Strand River!”

Slowly the log was drawn from the bank and into the centre of the river. The current was so strong that it washed the shoes from the Princess’s feet, and floated them on to the bank lower down, where the Witch found them next day and rejoiced, thinking that their owner was surely drowned. Still Grey Goose and Gander swam on, until a feeling of deadly chill warned the Princess that they were entering the fog-bank. Colder and colder it grew, so that she lost all sensation in hands and feet, and only the warm furry weight on her shoulder and the incessant purring at her ear kept her conscious.

After what seemed an endless time the mist grew lighter, and with a feeling of unspeakable relief Arminell emerged into brilliant sunshine, and saw before her the

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hills and valleys of a strange land, far more beautiful than that she had left behind. In another moment the raft was close to shore, the cat jumped down, and rising from her seat she stood ankle-deep in water to release the weary birds from their bonds. This done she stepped on shore and looked around for her guide.

He had disappeared, but a few paces away stood a handsome youth in a close-fitting dress of fine white fur, with collar and girdle of emeralds, and a brooch of emeralds in his fur cap. As her eyes met his, he fell on his knees at her feet, seizing both her cold hands in his and kissing them ardently.

"What is this country and who are you?" she asked in utter bewilderment.

"This is my country. I am its King, and you shall be its Queen if you will—my Queen you are, whether you will or no."

"What does it mean, and where is Tony?" she asked again, averting her eyes from his gaze, and blushing as she thought of her rough attire and bare white feet.

"I am Tony," said the voice which was familiar to her, now that she could not see

The One Strand River 23

who uttered it. "My true name is Leolin, and I am king of this northern land. A year ago, in sheer defiance and against the advice of my counsellors, I determined to cross the One Strand River alone, to discover what lay beyond the mist. My boat struck a rock and sank before I could reach the shore; and when I saved myself by swimming, it was only to fall into the hands of the Witch, who changed me into a cat, with a cat's nature, and nothing human left to me save the power of speech. Even the memory of my former life had gone, and only your gentle presence and sweet unselfishness have gradually triumphed over the evil spell, and recalled to me the knowledge of the means of escape for both of us. To you I owe my deliverance, and from henceforth I am your servant."

"Pray rise—I have done nothing; it is you who have saved us both," said Arminell. "Where shall we go now?"

"This road goes straight to my capital city, and just round the lee of that hill is a palace belonging to my elder sister, who has been sister and mother both to me. If you

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will trust yourself once more to my guidance I will lead you thither by a near path through the meadows, which will be easier for your dear feet than the hard roads. It is by no will of mine that you travel afoot in my dominions even so far."

The Princess suffered him to take her hand and lead her over the soft turf until they reached the palace. The gates were just opening to allow the King's sister to pass through, a stately and beautiful lady, who sprang from her horse to throw herself into her brother's arms with tears of joy. When she heard his story she greeted Arminell as a sister and led her within, where the mean garments of the swineherd were laid aside for robes more befitting a Princess.

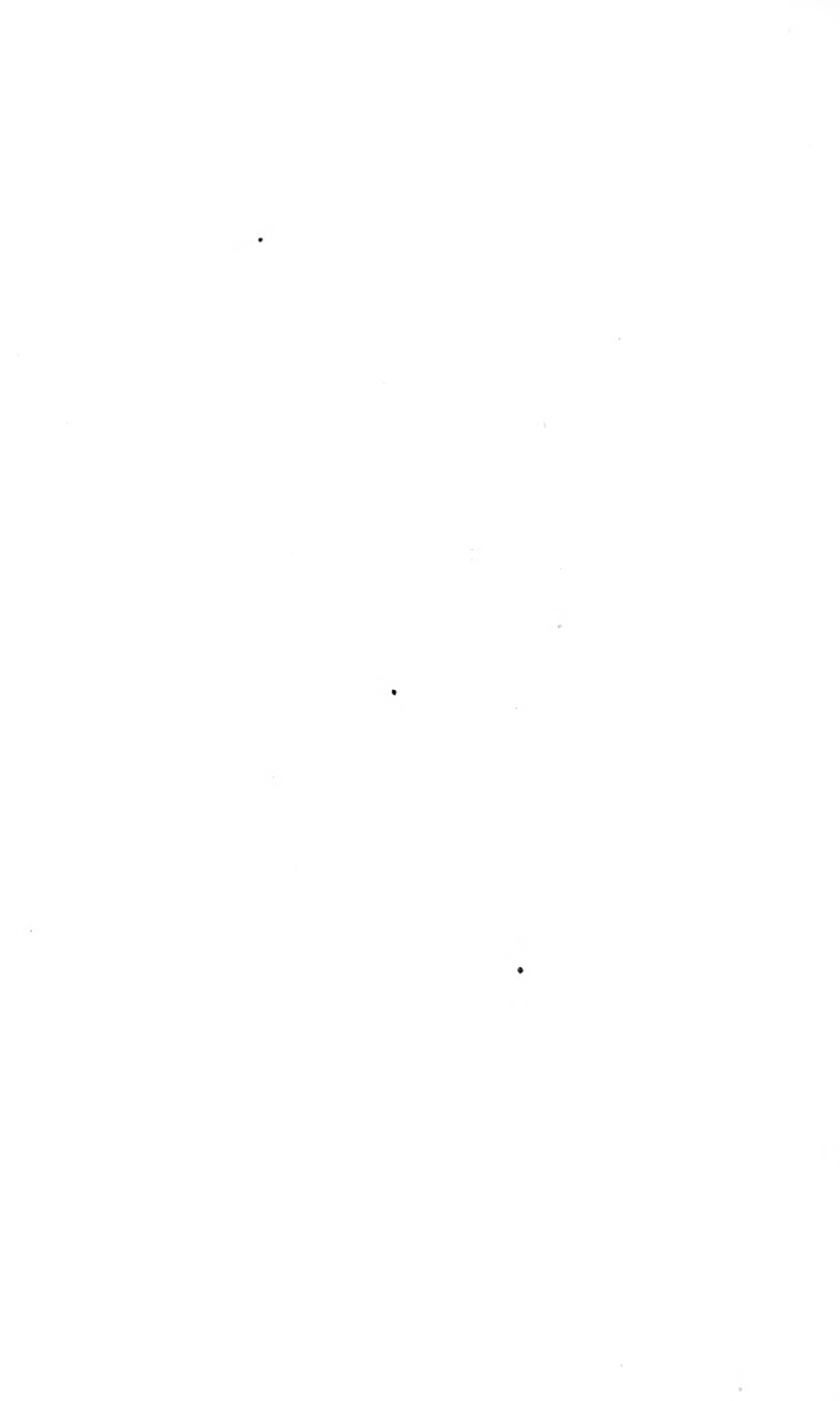
The tidings of the young King's return soon spread, and when morning came rejoicing crowds were seen surrounding the palace, desiring to be satisfied by actual sight of him. Among them came the great nobles, the Ministers of State, and the heads of the army, and Leolin's first care was to send a strong force against the Good King's

The One Strand River 25

enemies, with an embassy demanding his immediate restoration to the throne.

In less than a week the news came that the loyalists, thus reinforced, had put the rebel army to flight, and Leolin escorted Arminell back to her home—not across the river, but by sea. It was not long, however, before he came again to claim her as his bride.

The sweet nature and sunny disposition, which had smoothed her path as a swineherd, now made her the best and most beloved of Queens. She did not forget her other friends, and would willingly have given them places at Court, but Grey Goose and Grey Gander had grown fat and lazy, and appeared so happy as they were that she left them in peace; and to this day their descendants may be seen, by any one who cares to travel so far, sunning themselves on the banks of the One Strand River.



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"THE KING OF SPAIN'S DAUGHTER CAME TO VISIT ME."

The Little Nut-Tree

“I had a little nut-tree, nothing would it bear
But a silver nutmeg, and a golden pear:
The King of Spain’s daughter came to visit me
And all for the sake of my little nut-tree.”

Nursery Rhyme.

ROGER, the blacksmith, stood outside the smithy door one bright May-day and shaded his eyes with his hand as he looked first toward the town, then away over the country roads, to see if any business was stirring in his direction. The roads were almost deserted except for little groups of children hurrying to school; but presently he heard the sound of a horse’s feet approaching down a winding lane that led from a distant village.

“There’s a shoe loose there, or I’m no smith,” he said to himself; and casting a glance at the fire of his forge, to see that it

28 The Little Nut-Tree

was burning brightly, he stepped out into the road to see what was coming.

A little spring-cart came slowly down the hill drawn by an old white horse, one of whose shoes seemed to hang by a single nail. In the cart sat a quaint-looking old woman with a red cloak and flapping white sun-bonnet, and she called to the young man to stand at the horse's head while, with the help of her crutch-handled staff, she slowly dismounted. The cart, as Roger saw, was full of poultry, live hens in coops, dead pullets tied together by the feet, and fat chickens plucked and trussed for the kitchen, carefully packed in large market-baskets.

"See to my horse, young man, and be quick about it, will you?" she said, and sat down to wait on a little bench which Roger had put under the nut-tree growing by the smithy door. "I've lost an hour already with having to drive slowly, and I shall miss my turn at the market unless you bustle up."

Roger was a youth of few words, and he set about his task without remark. His customer, however, had no idea of silence, and she presently went on, "You are young

for a blacksmith, my lad. What is your father doing to leave such heavy work to you alone?"

"My father died last year, and I took up his trade," said Roger, plying the bellows. "Our people have worked this forge for seven generations. He and I, and my grandfather and great grandfather, and *his* father and grandfather before him, were all smiths."

"Seventh blacksmiths in a line of blacksmiths—why, young man, that's a patent of nobility!" cried the old dame, striking the ground with her stick. "To be a worker in iron is to be lucky—every fool knows that; but to be the seventh in line—why, you may be as great as a king if you make the most of your fortune!"

The youth laughed merrily, but only answered, "So I've heard," and finished his work in silence. Soon, however, the old henwife began again. "A fine nut-tree this, young man!"

"Fine to look at, maybe, but it bears no fruit," said Roger, putting down his tools. "My father planted it the day I was born—nineteen years ago this very morning—and

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not a nut has ever grown on it. Now, mother, your horse is shod," and he carefully helped her back to her seat in the cart. "Nay, I want no pay : if I am to be as lucky as you tell me, I can do without your pence. You're kindly welcome!" As he spoke, he stooped to pick up the cast horseshoe, meaning to throw it aside on a heap of old iron.

"Keep the shoe, it may bring you the luck," said the old woman as she shook her reins, and the horse moved slowly off. "Stick to iron, young man ; it's better than silver and gold—better than silver and gold!" and as the sound of her wheels died away in the distance he fancied he could still hear her repeating, "Better than silver and gold!" He stood holding the worn horseshoe for a moment, then an idea struck him, and taking a hammer he nailed the shoe to the nut-tree.

Now every one knows that all henwives deal in white magic, and this one was no exception to the rule, for when autumn came the nut-tree for the first time bore fruit. True, there were only two fruits, and one was not a nut at all, which made it all the stranger. On one branch could be seen a

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fine yellow pear, that shone like gold; and on another what seemed to be a large nut, but on looking closely a silver nutmeg could be seen inside the husk. Every customer at the smithy saw the curious sight, and soon Roger had more work than he could well manage, for every one who could find a job to be done at the forge came in order to look at the famous nut-tree. By-and-bye came more distinguished visitors, for the Princess of Spain, who was travelling through the land on her way home from visiting a neighbouring Court, sent her chamberlain to buy the nutmeg and the pear for her at any price the blacksmith would name.

Roger refused to sell. "What's mine's my own, and what's my own I keep," he said. "I sell my labour but not my goods." I may give or share—sell I will not." So the chamberlain, discomfited, went back to tell the Princess, and she immediately ordered out her gilded coach, with postillions and outriders, and went herself in state to persuade the obdurate smith.

All the idlers of the countryside came running as the glittering coach drew up at

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the smithy door, and Roger came out, hammer in hand, to see what was wanted of him. His eyes were turned on the six magnificent horses with their golden shoes, and he scarcely looked at the King of Spain's daughter as she begged him to gather the fruit of his nut-tree for her.

"Only give me the nutmeg and the pear and I will make you rich," she said.

"I can earn my own living and be beholden to no one," said the youth. "I do not sell my luck."

"My father will make you a great lord," urged the Princess.

"I am a blacksmith and the seventh of a line of blacksmiths," said Roger, drawing himself up proudly, "can your father show a better descent? If he could make me a King I should say the same."

The Princess looked at him approvingly, for he was a personable youth, tall and well-built, with a bright open face. "Can I do nothing to persuade you?" she said with her sweetest smile; but it was quite lost on the blacksmith, who was looking at a loose pin in one of the coach-wheels, and in his

anxiety to set it right, he never answered her at all. So in high dudgeon she gave the word to drive on, and he went back to his forge without so much as a glance behind him.

Next morning as he was hard at work, he heard a gentle voice at the door saying, "May I rest awhile on your bench here?" Looking up he saw a girl, a gipsy as he thought, for the country people around were fair and blue-eyed, and this was evidently one of another race. She was dressed like the peasants in a cotton gown with heavy wooden shoes, but instead of a cap or bonnet a bright yellow kerchief was twisted round her black locks. She was pale and weary-looking, and seemed ready to drop from fatigue, so Roger, throwing down hammer and tongs, ran forward to push the seat further into the shade of the nut-tree and place her in the most comfortable corner. She thanked him with a charming smile.

"You look sadly weary," he said, lingering on the threshold of the forge, "can I do anything for you?"

"I've walked five miles across the fields

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this morning in the blazing sun, and my feet are so bruised and sore that I can hardly bear it," said the girl, kicking her shoes off impatiently. Her feet and ankles were curiously small and white for a peasant, but Roger only saw that they were cruelly bruised with the heavy shoes, and he hastened to bring out a pail of water for her to bathe them in, and a clean cotton neckerchief—he had nothing else—to dry them. Before she put on the shoes again, he showed her how to make them more comfortable by padding the toes with soft grass.

"I thank you, Sir," said the girl, looking up at him shyly with a pair of soft dark-brown eyes. "I am ashamed to give you so much trouble."

"It is no trouble ;" said Roger, "what else can I do to ease you ?"

"I am parched with thirst," she said ; "I should be most grateful for a cup of water."

Roger rubbed his curly head in sore perplexity. The water in the pail was all that he had ; the spring from which it was drawn was a furlong away ; his mid-day meal and draught of butter-milk had not yet been

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brought to him. He could not let this fainting damsel go away thirsty, that was clear. As he looked around for inspiration, the golden gleam of the magic pear caught his eye, and without a moment's hesitation he stretched out a long arm, plucked the fruit, and offered it to his visitor. She thanked him with a pretty blush, but refused to accept it. "I cannot eat it unless you share it," she said ; so Roger sat down beside her, cut it carefully in half, and they ate it together. It was quite ripe, with a delicious flavour ; but Roger ate his share absently, thinking only of the pretty face beside him, and trying to remember where he could have seen it before.

Presently he was called away by a customer. After some delay he came hastily back, but his visitor was gone, and something had gone with her. The silver nutmeg had vanished and only the brown husk hung on the branch. Over the back of the bench was thrown the kerchief which had been bound round the girl's head, and in one corner of it was tied a ruby ring ; but of the girl herself not a trace was to be seen. He sought anxiously far and near

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but could neither find her nor hear of any one else who had met her ; only as he returned disconsolate to his work, a great clatter of hoofs and rumbling of wheels caused him to look up and see the Spanish Princess's coach go by in a cloud of dust.

His ideas moved rather slowly in a general way, and it never occurred to him to put the two things, or rather the two people, together, and conclude (what was indeed the fact) that the silver nutmeg might be found in the Princess's pocket, and that the strange visitor had been the Princess herself, no less.

It was not a very pretty thing for a King's daughter to do, was it? but she was a spoilt child, who had never been thwarted in her life, and she thought her favourite ring ample payment for the loss of such a trifling thing as a silver nutmeg, which could hardly be worth a crown piece. But she was punished, as you shall hear.

In the days which followed Roger went about his work as usual, but a change had passed over him, which could plainly be seen. Instead of whistling and singing at the anvil he was silent and gloomy, and his spare time

was spent in aimless wandering, or in sitting alone brooding over he hardly knew what. He was haunted by dreams of a lovely face with pleading brown eyes, and the low sweet voice rang perpetually in his ears ; but he could learn nothing of the gipsy girl, nor did he hope ever to see her again.

At last, when the winter was passed and the Spring came again, he sought out the old henwife and told her the story from beginning to end.

“ Do you wish for my advice ? ” she said.

“ If you cannot help me no one can,” said Roger.

“ Well, then, you must find the nutmeg. Its loss would have mattered little if you had not shared the pear,” said the henwife ; “ but as it is, you are but half a man, and will not be better until you find her who shared it, and compel her to give back what she stole. There will be no peace for you until you have done this, even though it take you half a lifetime.”

Roger returned home meditating, and the next day he rose betimes and put on his best clothes, with a new leather apron and a bright

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hammer stuck in his belt to show his craft. From under the hearthstone he took the old stocking which contained his father's savings, and with these in his pouch, the ring on his finger, and a stout staff in his hand, he set out to follow the sun round the world until he should find his silver nutmeg.

So it happened that after he had travelled seven months, seven days, and seven hours exactly, he came to Spain, and the first person that met him was a herald, proclaiming to all and sundry that the man who could heal the King's daughter of her strange disease should receive as reward the hand of the lady herself, a kingdom in the New World, and a castle in Spain.

"What ails the Princess?" said Roger, remembering how she had once endeavoured to buy from him the very thing for which he was now searching.

"That is what no one knows and so no one can cure it," replied the herald. "Since she returned from her travels a year ago she has done nothing but weep and mourn, so that the whole kingdom is plunged in melancholy. The wise men say that the cure

for her complaint lies in a charm of silver, fashioned like a nutmeg, which she brought home with her. Whence it came none can tell ; and how the charm is to work none can tell either. If the nutmeg could be broken, they think, the spell which binds her might break too ; but the heaviest weights and the most powerful machinery will not so much as dent it, therefore there must be magic in it."

"Now, can this be my nutmeg, and can the Princess have bribed the gipsy-girl to steal it?" thought Roger ; but when presently he met the Princess's carriage returning from her daily drive, the sight of her face, sad and pale, as it was, revealed the whole story to him.

With unaccustomed quickness he made up his mind what to do next. In the morning, at the appointed hour of audience, he presented himself before the King and offered to cure the Princess.

"You are surely not a physician," said the King, looking at him in some perplexity.

"No, Sire, I am a blacksmith by trade and descent, but I believe I can break the spell which is on your daughter."

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“ You are a wizard then ? ”

“ No, Sire, I am an honest man.”

“ Well,” said the King, after a pause, “ do your best. But remember this—if you succeed you shall have my daughter and her dowry ; but if you fail then you shall be strangled for your presumption in aspiring to marry a Princess.”

“ I take the risk,” said Roger simply ; and the King nodding approval, rose and led him to the Princess, where she sat in her bower weeping like a rain-cloud. At the sight of the youth she blushed violently and hid her face with one hand, while the tears dripped between her fingers. On a little table beside her lay the silver nutmeg.

Without saying a word Roger drew the hammer from his belt and gently tapped the nutmeg. It broke instantly, and out of it fell a little gold ring. This he picked up, and falling on one knee before the lady slipped it on one of the slender fingers of her disengaged hand, which he kissed—first respectfully, then rapturously. Instantly she stopped crying, dried her tears, and with a happy smile stretched out the other hand and raised him to her side.

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This is the story of how Roger the blacksmith married the King of Spain's daughter and became a King himself; and if any one does not believe it—well, so much the worse for that person. You will not find it in the Histories, that is certain. But to this day you may hear the little children sing :

“ I had a little nut-tree, nothing would it bear
But a silver nutmeg and a golden pear:
The King of Spain's daughter came to visit me
And all for the sake of my little nut-tree.”

The Black Hen

“Hickety-Pickety, my black hen,
She lays eggs for gentlemen,
Gentlemen come every day
To see what my little black hen can lay.”

Nursery Rhyme.

THE King lay ill, almost at the point of death. The physicians vainly tried to cure him, and the wisest among them said, “Nothing can do him any good save the eggs of a black hen.”

Now there was but one black hen in the kingdom, and that belonged to a henwife whose charms and spells were the dread of all who knew her, old or young, gentle or simple. When it was known that she possessed such a hen, the Chief Steward of the palace went in state, with his gold chain about his neck, and his gold-headed staff of

office in his hand, and offered her any price she liked to name for the bird.

“No,” said the henwife, “I will not sell her ; but you may have the egg she laid this morning if you will pay me a broad gold piece for it.”

The Chief Steward paid the price without murmuring, and went away, carrying the egg in his hand. As he passed through the gate the black hen herself flew up suddenly in his face, so that he stumbled, dropped the egg on the hard ground (where it was broken), and, in his confusion, lost his gold-headed staff, and went home discomfited.

Next day the Chief Physician went himself, and to him the henwife made the same reply. He also paid for an egg, and wrapped it carefully in a silk handkerchief to carry it home, taking a path which led over soft turf so as to run as little risk as possible. When half his journey was over the hen flew unexpectedly out of a gorse-bush, and startled him so that he jerked the egg out of the handkerchief, and it rolled away. As he stooped to look for it, his gold-rimmed spectacles fell off and were broken ; and he had

much ado, without them, to find even his way home again, much less the egg.

On the third day, the Chief Warder was sent with orders to arrest both hen and henwife, and bring them to the palace. The henwife was not to be seen, but the hen was sitting beside the kitchen fire and made no attempt to escape, so the Warder caught her by the feet and prepared to carry her off. As he did so he saw the egg which she had just laid lying on the floor, and thinking he had better secure that also, he considered what would be the best way of carrying it. In one hand he had the hen, in the other the bunch of golden keys which were his badge of office, so he could think of nothing better than to put the egg in his mouth.

Whom should he meet on the threshold but the henwife.

“What are you doing with my darling Hickety-Pickety?” said she.

The Chief Warder could not speak for fear of dropping the egg, so he frowned and said, “H’m, h’m.”

“That’s no answer,” said she. “Give her back to me, will you?”

“H’m, h’m,” said or grunted the Chief Warder again, and shook his golden keys threateningly. Startled by the noise, the hen wriggled her head round and pecked his hand viciously, so that he dropped both egg, hen, and golden keys, while the henwife pushed him out of the door and slammed it in his face.

“This won’t do,” said the King’s son, when the third messenger returned empty handed. “I must go myself, or my father will die.” The next day was Sunday, when he must go to church with the Court ; but on Monday morning early he dressed himself in a cast-off livery-suit belonging to one of his lackeys, and away he went.

“Good morning, King’s son,” said the henwife. “Do you think to deceive me so easily? As it pleases you to play the servant you shall serve me for a week, and your daily wage shall be the egg which Hickety-Pickety lays. Every morning you shall draw water, chop wood, feed the fowls, and clean out the hen-house ; then you are free to take the egg to your father ; but first you must find it, for she is not shut up with the other hens, but

strays about just as she pleases. If on any one day you fail to find the egg, you shall bind yourself by signs and spells to be my bondservant till you die."

"Very well," said the King's son, and taking off his coat he set to work at his allotted tasks. Long before they were done he heard the hen clucking, but where she had laid her egg he could not tell, and when at last he had time to seek for it she was nowhere to be seen. He looked in every corner of the poultry-yard, then in the garden, then in the orchard—all in vain. Next it occurred to him that she might have laid indoors, and he searched diligently in kitchen and dairy, but saw no sign of the egg. Lastly, he went to look among the gorse-bushes on the common, but it was a hopeless task, and when the sun was just above the horizon he was still empty handed, and he sat down in despair and hid his face in his hands.

Some one touched his shoulder, and looking up he saw beside him a young girl, poorly dressed, but fair and sweet as heart could wish. "King's son," she said, "do not

despair, for I will help you. The hen has laid her egg on the roof-tree, between two chimney-stacks, and you will find a ladder behind the hen-house; but make haste, for the henwife will be back from the market soon, and she must not find you here after sunset."

Hastily the King's son did as she bade him, found the egg, and carried it safely home to his father, who ate it, and appeared so marvellously refreshed and strengthened that the son set off next morning with a light heart, and arrived at the cottage before the henwife was awake. The young girl came out to meet him.

"Do not stay to thank me," she said. "I am a King's child like you, but the henwife has bound me by signs and spells to be her bondservant till I die, or till a King's son sets me free. Every week-day I will aid you to the best of my power, but on the seventh day you must take me home with you and make me your wife."

"Indeed I will do it, and gladly," said the King's son. "Princess or serving-maid, no woman's face ever pleased me as yours does;

and whether I win my father's life and your freedom, or lose both and become your fellow servant, none other shall be my wife."

"Do your task, then, and look out for the hen when you hear her call," said the girl, vanishing indoors. Soon a triumphant cluck was heard, and looking round quickly the young man saw the hen rest for a moment on the coping of a dry well before flying away.

As soon as his work was done he went to look for the egg, and sure enough there it was lying on the mud at the bottom of the well. Seizing the rope he let himself down, but it was rotten with age and broke before he had gone far, so that he suddenly found himself ankle-deep in the mud, somewhat shaken and dazed, but unhurt, and sorely puzzled as to how he was to get out again. The sides of the well were smooth and slimy, and gave no hold to hands or feet; and though he shouted with all his might his voice was lost in the depth of the shaft. The day went slowly by, and only an hour before sunset did he hear the girl's voice above him.

"I will let down the ladder to you," she said. "It is short, but perhaps when you stand on it you can touch the end of the rope. The upper part is sound enough, if only you can reach it."

Thankfully the King's son caught the ladder, propped it against the side of the well, and began to climb it. When he had reached the topmost rung the rope was still above his reach and he must needs spring to catch it. Twice he failed and fell again to the bottom, but the third time he succeeded in grasping it, and slowly and wearily he climbed to upper air. When he set foot on firm ground again he was pale and well-nigh fainting, but the egg was packed safely in the crown of his cap.

The maiden brought him a cup of water and a crust of bread, and thus refreshed he set out on his homeward journey and brought the egg in safety to his father.

On the third day the hen laid her egg in the watch-dog's kennel, and if the King's son had never been puzzled before he was so now, for the henwife was at home and the least growl from the fierce beast brought her

out to see what was the matter. The girl was kept busy within doors, and only when her mistress dozed by the fire in the late afternoon could she steal out and join her companion.

The great mastiff whimpered with delight at her approach, thumped his tail on the ground, and allowed her to pull his ears, tickle his chin, and stroke him down the middle of his nose, while the young man crept on hands and knees to the end of the kennel and triumphantly brought out the prize.

On the fourth day the hen laid her egg in an empty rook's nest on the topmost bough of a tall elm tree. The King's son started to climb for it, not knowing that the bough was rotten, and before he reached the nest it gave way and he fell heavily to the ground. His former fall was nothing to this, and he lay senseless for an hour, until the girl came out to seek him. When she saw what had happened she was in despair for a moment; then she remembered the magic cordial with which she had sometimes seen the henwife cure the hurts of many who came to her, and could afford to pay for help. Running back to the cottage she was lucky

enough to find it without difficulty, and pouring a few drops into the young man's mouth she saw him open his eyes and presently sit up healed. "See," said he, "the branch has fallen to the ground and the nest with it; perhaps the egg is still there." There indeed it was, still unbroken, and one more day's work was done. The sun was still high in the heaven, and the witch-wife was far away, so that on this day the young people had both time and opportunity to improve their acquaintance, and you may be sure they did not fail to do so.

On the fifth day the egg was laid on an islet in the middle of a mere on the common, and cost the King's son nothing more than a wetting; but the sixth day threatened to be the hardest of all, for after long and anxious search they found that Hickety-Pickety had hidden her egg under the elbow-chair in which the henwife sat peacefully shelling peas for her Sunday's dinner.

"What shall we do, dear love?" cried the King's son, as this fact dawned on him. "She will sit there till the sun sets, I am sure of it, and then I am undone!"

“Don’t despair, dear friend! Wait here by the door till I call you,” said the girl, and entering the cottage she sat down quietly to her spinning wheel and began to spin. Presently, above the low, drowsy hum of the wheel, he heard her singing a low, drowsy song; and as it went on his head sank on his chest, his eyes closed, and he fell fast asleep leaning against the door-post. By-and-bye the song died away, the wheel gradually stopped, and the girl’s voice cried softly: “She is asleep! Come and take the egg!” The young man only stirred uneasily, and slept again more heavily than before. Again she cried: “Come quickly, dear friend! You must take it yourself, or the compact is broken,” but still he did not wake. Then she was alarmed, and came out to see what was the matter; and great was her dismay when she saw that her charm had taken effect where she least intended that it should. She shook him by the shoulder, spoke in his ear, pinched his arm, all to no effect; and she began to fear that the fatal hour would come while he still slept.

“Blood will break the charm,” she said,

and drawing his dagger from its sheath she made a little cut in the tip of one of his fingers. Instantly and noiselessly he woke, and at a sign from her he entered the kitchen, took the egg from its hiding-place, and softly stole away.

When the King had eaten the sixth egg the physicians declared him to be perfectly recovered and in no need of further treatment. "You will not need to return to the henwife's service again," said he to his son, "for I am cured of my disease, and to-morrow is Sunday."

"Nevertheless I must go," said the King's son, "for to-morrow I claim the best part of my wages," and he told his father the tale of all that happened during the week. The King was silent for a short time, and then he said: "I thought to have chosen a wealthy bride for you, my only son; but you have played the man this week and won the right to choose for yourself. I will accept the daughter whom you bring me, and thank her too."

Next morning the King's son found his bride awaiting him at the gate, with her

clothes tied up in a little bundle. "We must fly," said she, "for if the henwife overtakes us before we reach the nearest church all is lost. Here is the black hen's egg, it may be useful ; and here is a bag of corn, I will take that, too, if you will carry my bundle."

They hastened away over the broad common, and presently the black hen came flying after them and endeavoured to delay them by fluttering in their faces and beating her wings about their heads. The King's son tried to catch her, but she was too nimble for him. "I know a better way," said the girl, and emptied her bag of corn on the ground. The greedy little hen at once stopped and began picking up the grains as fast as she could swallow them, while the lovers hastened on. By-and-bye a deep bay was heard, and looking round they saw the great mastiff hard at their heels.

"I can deal with him," said the girl, and she threw the egg which she carried in her hand right into the open jaws of the dog, who immediately turned round and trotted straight home again.

“ Now the henwife will come herself, and if she overtakes us it will go ill with me,” said the maiden. “ Throw away the bundle and take my hand, for we must run ”; and hand in hand they flew over the rough ground, until afar off they heard the faint sound of a church bell. As they neared the church they could hear the panting of the henwife as she followed in their track ; but just as her hand touched the flying skirt of the girl they entered the lych-gate of the churchyard, and she was obliged to stay outside, stamping and shaking her fist at them.

The church was full of people, the lords and ladies of the Court and their servants, and the King himself in front of all. As soon as the mass was said the King’s son led his bride forward, and with a word to the priest they were married before all the congregation—she in her cotton gown and white kerchief, and he in the faded livery-coat in which he had won her. As the final words were said, the henwife gave a cry of rage and despair and fled away, and neither she nor her black hen were ever heard of again.

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“The better the day the better the deed,” said the King, as he kissed the fair cheek of his daughter-in-law. “The boy has worked all week to bring me life and health, but the best gift of all has been won to-day,” and taking her hand in his he led the way home.

The Royal Road

“**I** HATE lessons!” said the Princess, pushing back her coronet impatiently, as she threw down her diamond pen and ivory-backed Latin Grammar. “What’s the use of being a Princess if one has to work like a scullery-maid all day?” It was not a wise speech, perhaps; but one does not expect much wisdom from nine years, and there was no one to hear it but Marcus Aurelius, Cat-in-Ordinary to the Royal Schoolroom.

“You speak foolishly, Princess,” said he, severely. “You will be Queen some day, and will have to govern and make laws for your people; and what would your Prime Minister and Cabinet think of a Queen who didn’t know her irregular verbs, and had not the multiplication table at her finger-ends?”

“Well, I hate them all the same,” said the

Princess ; “and I won’t learn them either—so there !”

“ In fact, you think you can rest content with *being* like a neuter verb,” said the Cat, “but it won’t work. If you refuse to *do*, you must *suffer*—as the Duchess of Elfdale, your Highness’ instructress, will no doubt demonstrate to you when she finds those verbs unlearnt. It is a lovely day, Princess ; the sun is so bright and the breeze is so cool—Prince Tito is out already with his nurse, and your pony is longing to be saddled and brought out for you to ride. You will not like to be kept in all the afternoon.”

“ It’s too bad !” cried her Royal Highness. “ Why should one have to bear what one doesn’t like ?”

“ That is just what Prince Tito said this morning when I went into the nursery and found him howling because Her Majesty had been washing his face. ‘ Why should I be washed when I don’t like it ?’ ” he sobbed. I understood him, for I understand all languages, even Baby-talk. ‘ Don’t cry for what can’t be helped,’ I told him. ‘ When I was a kitten I used to cry when my mother

washed my face, but when I was given away I missed her terribly, and would have given anything to feel the rough side of her tongue again. *You* will be given away some day, most likely, and then you'll be sorry you haven't a kind mother to give you a lick all over.' I could have said more, but did not, for he was engaged in rolling Her Majesty's second-best crown on the floor, and had stopped crying."

"You're very fond of preaching," said the Princess—it was true, perhaps, but Princesses should not be rude, even to pussy-cats. "You're worse than the Duchess, a great deal; all she says when I grumble is, 'Well, Princess, it cannot be helped; there's no Royal Road to learning.'"

"There is a Royal Road nevertheless," said Marcus Aurelius; "some people spend all their lives in seeking for it, and never find it at all, or only when they have no longer strength to walk on it. The ordinary road is best for ordinary people."

"But I'm not an ordinary person," said this conceited little girl. "I'm a Princess, and the Royal Road belongs to me, if there

is one. Perhaps, as you are so wise about it, you will tell me where to find it."

"I know, but I will not tell," said Marcus Aurelius, looking wiser than ever, as he tucked his paws under him, and prepared for a short meditation. That is, he called it meditation. Princess Lilia called it napping, but that may have been an unfounded libel. On the present occasion he was certainly wide-awake, for as she tossed all her lesson books into an untidy heap, threw her coronet into the air and caught it again before putting on her garden hat, and opened the long window of the schoolroom, from which an ivy-grown terrace and a flight of narrow steps led down to the garden, he purred softly, "Hadn't you better learn the irregular verbs *first*, Princess, in case you shouldn't find the Royal Road?"

"You tiresome old thing," cried Lilia, stamping with vexation. "Will you tell me the way or not? You might just as well, for if you don't I shall find it out in spite of you!"

"I cannot tell you, it is forbidden," said the Cat. "All I can do is to help you find

your way home again. Pull three hairs from the tip of my tail, and take great care of them ; then, when you are tired of the search, just put them in the palm of your hand, and blow them all away at one breath, and before you can say 'Julius Cæsar' you'll be back here just as you were."

The Princess took the three bristles and put them carefully in a bonbonnière cut out of a single emerald which she wore at her girdle. "Good bye, Pussy!" she cried, and with this parting shot (for Marcus Aurelius had a strong objection to that undignified title) she ran down the terrace steps into the garden, and avoiding the sunny lawn where her baby brother lay sprawling and kicking to his heart's content, watched by his nurse, she passed through the little wicket gate that led into the great forest bounding the Palace grounds on the south, which she was forbidden to enter alone. At first the green gloom was pleasant and refreshing after the bright sunshine, but by-and-bye it seemed to grow strange and eerie. Mysterious whisperings were heard among the branches, strange faces seemed to peep from behind the tree-

trunks, and terrible forms lay hidden in the undergrowth. She ran on, tearing her clothes and scratching her face in the brambles, and at last, tired out and breathless, paused to find herself in a little clearing, where a patch of soft moss offered a tempting seat, and a bank covered with wild strawberries afforded delicious refreshment. Having satisfied her thirst, she leaned back against the gnarled trunk of a giant oak and looked down the long forest avenues on every side of her, slowly realising that she had not the least idea in which direction to seek for the Royal Road.

An angry buzzing met her ear, and looking more closely at a bramble-bush near her she saw a bee struggling vainly to free itself from a spider-web. To release it was the work of a moment only, and lifting it on her finger she said gravely, "You careless little thing! Why didn't you look where you were going before you got into such a tangle?"

"Don't *you* talk," said the bee sharply. "I should like to know if you looked where you were going when you came here?"

"I came to look for the Royal Road," said

The Royal Road 65

the Princess. "Perhaps you can tell me the way to it."

"No I can't," said the bee, "but I dare say the Dryad can."

"Where can I find the Dryad?" asked Lilia.

"Why, I have no right to tell you, as you are only a human being. But one good turn deserves another—besides, I know you, Princess; your Government is the only sensible one in the world, and why? Because it is copied from ours. You are governed only by Queens; so are we. You have something yet to learn; you let your drones—men I mean—do lots of work that we know can only be properly performed by us, the Spinsters; also you don't kill off your husbands when you've done with them, as we do; but no doubt that will be set to rights when you are Queen."

"I shan't have a husband," said Lilia. "Tito can command the army when he grows up, and that is all men are ever good for. Tell me about the Dryad."

"She is the Queen of the Forest, and her usual residence is that great oak behind you;

but she has other houses. If you really want to see her you must wait for moonlight, and then knock three times at the front door—I mean the side of the trunk nearest the moon. Then if you are not frightened you will see something—perhaps! Are you hungry? I can tell you where to find a honeycomb.”

The Princess declined the obliging offer and the bee flew away, leaving her alone to while away the remaining hours of sunshine as best she might. The cool shade of the oak, the drowsy hum of insects, and the murmur of a brook close by, though unseen, all invited to slumber; and before long she fell into a deep sleep, from which she was only roused at length by the moonlight shining full upon her face. Starting up, unable at first to recollect where she was, and how she came to be sleeping in the heart of the forest instead of her own little white bedroom, she gazed about her in bewilderment. Slowly the events of the day came back to her memory, and she knew that the hour was come for consulting the Dryad.

If truth must be told the idea frightened her not a little. In broad daylight it had

appeared a very daring and original project to set out on one's own account in search of a road other people knew nothing of, and appeared to do very well without ; but here in the ghostly moonlight, alone and helpless, it was a different matter. Still, with all her faults, Lilia was a real Princess, and real Princesses are never cowards. She only stayed one moment to arrange her tumbled white frock, and to put on the big hat which she had thrown off on first sitting down, then she boldly approached the oak and tapped thrice on its bark.

Instantly it divided, and as she involuntarily drew back, a wonderful lady stood before her. She was very tall—so tall that the child felt like a field daisy beside a white lily ; her soft flowing robes shimmered faintly in the moonlight, a girdle of oak leaves clasped her waist, and her waving hair, which fell nearly to her feet, was confined by a chaplet of mistletoe leaves and berries. Her face was so awful in its loveliness that Lilia cast down her eyes after one glance, and stood in silence before her.

After a pause the Dryad spoke, and her

voice was strange and sweet, like the wind sighing through the trees at dawn. "Why do you call me, little maiden?" she asked. "Why do you seek me here alone and at midnight when all good children are asleep at home?" and looking up Lilia caught a smile so kind and so merry that it reminded her of nothing but her own mother, and her fear vanished at once.

"I want to find the Royal Road," she said. "The bee said that you might know the way, and I thought perhaps you would tell me—no one else will!"

"And why do you want to know the way?" asked the Dryad, smiling again at the eager face turned up to her. "Are you so fond of learning, Princess, that you want to get it as fast as possible?"

Lilia blushed and looked down again. "No," she said after a pause, "I don't like the trouble of learning, and so I want to know everything without learning."

"Do you think the knowledge will be worth anything when you haven't won it fairly by hard work?" said the Dryad in a graver tone. "Is it quite honest, Princess, to want the

pleasure and profit of knowledge without paying the same price for it that others do?"

"I am a Princess," answered Lilia, rather defiantly, "and if there is a Royal Road, I think I ought to know it."

"Perhaps the best way after all will be to let you learn by experience," the Dryad said after thinking for a moment. "The Royal Road is at the other side of the world, and I have no time to take you there at present. It is full moon, and I have to receive my Court here—this is my drawing-room." As she finished speaking she drew out a silver whistle, and blew a soft low note. The trees around shook and shivered, their trunks seemed to split asunder as if struck by lightning, and in another moment the glade was filled with graceful figures. Around the Dryad gathered a troop of maidens, robed like herself, but shorter by the head, and crowned with acorns and oak-apples—these were the Hamadryads of the oaks. Then came the spirits of the firs, in darker dresses; the beeches, elms, ashes, hawthorns, all gave forth their guardian fairies; and last, most delicate and slender of all, came the Hama-

dryads of the birches, with broad girdles of silver. The maze of lovely forms in their filmy garments, illuminated by the full moon, was more beautiful than anything Lilia had ever before seen or imagined, and she watched in rapt admiration until darkness at length fell upon the scene, and as the last rays faded the wood-spirits glided back into their native trees.

In the deep hush that succeeded Lilia fell asleep once more, and when she awoke the sun was so low in the heavens that it was evident she had slept over the best part of the day. Besides her stood a pitcher of milk, with bread and fruit, a welcome sight to the hungry child, who had been without food for a day and night. When she had finished her simple meal the Dryad was again by her side, looking taller and lovelier than ever as the sunlight gleamed on her golden hair and delicate green draperies. Without a word she lifted the Princess in her arms, advanced to the middle of the clearing, and stepped upon a great flat stone which lay there. Immediately it began to sink, at first slowly, than faster and faster, till the Princess found

herself falling with tremendous speed through darkness such as she had never realised in her life ; but the protecting clasp still held her so firmly that she felt no fear. How long they continued to fall she had no idea, but at last it grew light again, she felt herself placed on firm ground, and rubbing her dazzled eyes she looked about her.

The Dryad was gone, and the Royal Road lay before her — a long pleasant-looking stretch of green turf, soft to the feet, and shaded from the bright sunshine by an avenue of tall trees whose branches were loaded with delicious fruit or sweet smelling flowers. Here and there sparkled fountains, whose musical splashing blended with the song of the birds who perched or flew overhead, and who, unlike the song-birds of other lands, had plumage as bright as the humming-bird or the kingfisher. Enchanted at the sight the Princess stepped forward eagerly, and in the same moment became aware that not only the neglected lesson, but the whole of the Latin Grammar, was as familiar to her as the alphabet. This was delightful, and she went on. At the next step she knew all the Latin

classics by heart ; a few steps further, and Greek was equally well known ; in the course of a half a dozen yards every other language, living or dead, from Sanskrit to Choctaw and Volapuk, had no more mysteries for her. The possession of so much knowledge was gratifying, but a trifle bewildering. Next came the knowledge of Music, then that of Art, and the nine-year-old Princess became a greater artist and musician (in theory) than all the members of all the Royal Academies in the world. She paused to take breath, and tried to collect her faculties, but in vain—they had grown too vast, to collect, and in despair she went on faster than ever.

Then came the Sciences—Geometry, Conics, Trigonometry, Algebra, Logarithms, Differential Calculus, Physics in every branch, Astronomy, Geology, Zoology, Entomology, Ornithology, Conchology, Biology, Physiology, Ethnology, Sociology, Psychology—faster and faster they thronged in on the poor little bewildered brain, and faster and faster she ran in the vain endeavour to get away from the hailstorm of learning which threatened to crush her beneath its weight.

Nature at last could bear no more, her senses gave way beneath the strain, and she fell fainting to the ground.

As her consciousness gradually returned, the first feeling which formed itself definitely in her mind was a longing to escape from the terrors which beset the Royal Road to learning. But how to escape? That was the next question. As she slowly opened her eyes the first object which met them was the little emerald box, which had become detached from its chain at her belt and had rolled close to her hand.

With a dreamy recollection of its use she lifted the shining green ball, opened it, took out the three bristles and blew them from her hand. Quick as thought, the trees, flowers, birds, and fountains disappeared, and rubbing her eyes once more she sat up to see the familiar walls of the schoolroom around her, and Marcus Aurelius regarding her sleepily from his usual corner of the sofa.

"You are soon tired of the Royal Road, Princess," said he. "I hardly expected you back so soon."

"Soon!" said Lilia. "I've been away

two days at least. What did every one say when they missed me?"

"You have been away exactly three-quarters of an hour," said Marcus Aurelius. "No one has missed you, and the Duchess won't be here for another half-hour. Hadn't you better learn those irregular verbs?"

Prince Florizel

FLORIZEL was in trouble. It was Examination Week, and while his elder brothers had acquitted themselves with credit in every subject in turn, he had sunk into deeper disgrace with every succeeding day, and at last failed so completely in his literature paper that Lady Athené (the governess of the young Princes, and a graduate of Princess Ida's famous college) had felt it her duty to send him into the Corner Room for punishment. There was really no excuse for him. Any one having the most casual acquaintance with Elvish Literature—much more a boy who had begun to write his age in two figures, and had enjoyed Lady Athené's instructions for three years—could have answered such simple questions as these :

1. Trace the descent of the Marquis of Carabas, and relate the circumstances which led to his assuming the crest of a cat rampant, argent, on a field vert.

2. Give in your own words the history of Cinderella, and draw a genealogical table showing her relationship to the present royal family.

3. Give some account of any two of the following:—Margery Daw, Humpty Dumpty, King Arthur, Dr. Faustus, Curlylocks, Tom Tucker.

4. Describe the crew and cargo of the ship with silken sails and golden masts.

5. Assign authors and dates to the following:—Baa Baa Black Sheep, Little Boy Blue, Mary Quite Contrary, The House that Jack Built.

6. Draw a map of Elfland, showing the road by which Beauty reached the palace of the Beast.

Yet strange to say, Florizel had declared the questions “horrid,” and spent the whole morning drawing fancy portraits of Lady Athené on his paper; and this was the result.

The Corner Room was so called because it contained seven corners, one for each of the seven Princes, so that when they were all naughty at once (which frequently happened) they could all be “put in the corner” together. There was no corner for the Baby Princess, because as we are taught (or used to be) in the Kindergarten, “Girls are *never* naughty!” Each corner was in fact a recess two feet deep in the circular wall, so that when each boy was put into his corner he could not see

any of the others, and so was deprived of the consolation of making faces at his companions in trouble.

On this particular afternoon Florizel was all alone, and the dead silence was so oppressive that he was quite startled when a very small clear voice, apparently from the ceiling, said, "Good afternoon, Prince Florizel."

He looked up, but all he could see was a spider high above him spinning away busily. Could it be she who had spoken? As he wondered she came down with a run, and hanging suspended by an almost invisible thread, just on a level with his eyes, she went on, "What's the matter with you to-day, Prince Florizel?"

"Everything," said Florizel, dolefully, "I can't do my examination, and so they say I'm idle, and put me in the corner; I can't learn things, and I want to be out digging in my garden. Papa's a genius, people say, and I'm sure he's none the better for it. There he sits muddling over his books all day, when he might be hunting and hawking and fishing and having a jolly time."

"Your papa is a great soldier, and is

writing a book on military tactics. My husband used to live in his study. Why don't you learn military tactics?" said the spider rather absently, for she felt something shaking her rope, and was trying to see if it were really a fly, or only the draught from the open window.

Florizel opened his eyes very wide indeed.

"Why, I can't even spell it!" he said.

"Dear me, you're *very* backward," said his friend. "I think you aren't persevering enough. I can tell you a story about that. There was once a spider——"

"Oh, dear, please don't!" pleaded Florizel. "I know you're going to tell me the story of Bruce and the Spider, and I had to write it out six times only last week."

"It is a very good story all the same," said the spider in an offended tone, beginning to climb up again.

"No, don't go," implored the boy, "it is so dull down here. You know that spider hadn't to work with her head—only her hands. I can do that myself."

"I don't work with my hands!" exclaimed the spider, more furious than ever. "I

haven't any. I spin the threads out of my own inside—you can't do *that*! Hands, indeed! I never was so insulted in my life!"

"Now don't be cross, old lady," said Florizel, in a coaxing tone. "You see it just proves what I said—I can't learn things, or I should have known that. Of course I am not clever like you; but I should like to be one of the animals that do things. I had rather be an ant or a mole, or a bird, or a spider even, than a prince."

"That shows you have more brains than people give you credit for," said the spider approvingly. "As you haven't been born with our advantages, however, make the best of things; that's all I can say. Why, I believe I hear a buzz up there, and I'm so hungry—I haven't tasted a morsel since I finished my husband at breakfast, and he was so thin, poor fellow! Good-bye, and"—by this time she was half-way up her ladder, and her voice sounded very faint—"I think I wouldn't be a spider if I were you, as you are a boy, Prince Florizel!"

The buzzing first grew louder then fainter,

and at last died away altogether. Dead silence reigned in the Corner Room for awhile. Growing weary of standing Florizel sat down on the floor, drawing his knees up to his chin and clasping his arms round them, still with his face dutifully turned to the wall. After counting the diamonds in his shoe-buckles again and again, wondering what his brothers were doing, and waiting patiently for his release, he was beginning to feel rather drowsy, when he was aroused by a smart tap on his head. He got up hastily, and turned round to find himself confronted by a personage whom he instinctively knew to be the Fairy Godmother. Such a strange little old lady, scarcely so tall as himself, and seeming still shorter as she leaned on her gold-headed staff, and looked at him with a pair of eyes as bright and keen, he thought, as stars on a frosty night,

“So, Princeling!” she said, after a long pause, “discontented with being a Prince, are you? Only five minutes ago I was two thousand miles away, and I heard one of my godsons wishing to be a mole, or a bird, or

an ant, or a spider. So I came to see about it. Why do you talk such nonsense?"

"Because I have to learn things that I can't understand, and get punished for not doing what I can't do. I can't, really!" he went on eagerly, "unless you help me. You can easily make me clever, if you will, Madam, as you are a fairy."

"We don't do things in that way nowadays, godson. There may be an old-fashioned fairy here and there, who tries to turn out a perfect Prince or Princess by giving beauty and cleverness and good temper for christening gifts, but it doesn't answer. The children that are left with all their little defects and naughtinesses are loved more by their friends, we find, than the fairy-made article, with all the latest improvements. All we do is to give a helping hand with the education of our god-children, and this seems to me a case where the helping hand is wanted. You would like to be an inferior animal and have no duties? I don't object to gratifying you for once in a way. What is it to be?"

The boy looked at her a little nervously to see if she were really in earnest. Apparently

she was, for after turning him round three times she said, "Now, make up your mind what to be, say the name aloud, and you shall see what you shall see."

Florizel rapidly turned over in his mind the different wild creatures he had thought of. A mole—to be blind and live underground? The idea was terrible to a child who loved fresh air and sunshine above all things. An ant? Not much better. A spider—to be eaten by your wife as a "relish" with her breakfast? — A bird? The thought was delightful. Just to fly about all day long collecting twigs and moss to weave into a charming nest, to rock on the waving branches, to gather berries and fruit for dinner—nothing could be pleasanter. In a resolute voice he cried out, "I will be a bird."

Immediately, as it seemed, he found himself perched on the ledge of the highest window in the room, which had apparently increased to colossal dimensions. How he got there was a mystery, but as he saw that his arms were changed into dark blue wings he supposed he must have flown. If so, he

could surely fly again, and almost without thinking he found himself flying through the window and right across the great garden.

The new strange sensation was so inexpressibly delightful that for hours he was content to amuse himself with flying to and fro, exploring the highest tree-tops and the tallest pinnacles of the palace. He could see his six brothers playing hide-and-seek in the shrubberies till the tea-bell called them in. Soon after he saw the guard turn out before the principal entrance and salute, as a little procession passed out—first, two pages carrying, one a rattle, the other a mechanical doll; next, two nursery-maids bearing respectively a Persian kitten and a fluffy dog; lastly, Dame Gloriana, the chief nurse, carrying her six months old Royal Highness, Miranda Claribella, generally known as Princess Baby, resplendent in filmy laces and delicate embroideries. A tiny carriage drawn by two white goats, led by a negro boy in the Royal livery, came up to the foot of the marble steps; her Royal Highness was carefully laid on the silken cushions, and with a second negro holding a parasol over her head to

keep her pretty nose from freckles, Dame Gloriana walking beside her, pages in front and maids behind, Princess Baby started for her evening drive.

Prince Florizel, who, like all the princes, was the willing slave of his sister, flew down from his perch and tried to alight on the foot of the carriage. The little one crowed with delight, and held out her tiny hands, but the nurse flicked her fan at him, and he caught such an angry gleam from the eyes of pussy, who lay coiled up on a cushion close to him, that he thought it best to take flight. "Fancy having to run away from a cat!" he said to himself in disgust. "It's not all fun being a bird, and I am getting so hungry."

The last words were spoken aloud, and a passing sparrow answered them: "Why don't you go and catch flies with your friends there?" she said, nodding towards a flight of swallows who were sweeping around in wide circles, now high, now low, evidently busy in getting their evening meal.

"Why not?" said Florizel, joining the party as they swept past him, and trying to persuade himself that insects were infinitely

preferable to tea and bread-and-butter. It was no use, however, he could not fancy an insect diet, and, after one or two attempts to eat the flies he caught, he flew back to the palace and round to the schoolroom window. It was open, and the table was not yet cleared, so, perching on a bread-plate, he soon made up for lost time. Having satisfied his hunger he flew through the window, made off without further ado, and began to seek under the eaves of the palace for a convenient hole to pass the night in. While he was employed thus another swallow suddenly flew out of a corner, and seeing his puzzled look, said: "Can't find your nest, old fellow? Where are your wits gone?"

"I haven't a nest," said Florizel, startled at the sudden inquiry.

"Not got a nest? Where do your wife and family live then?" said the other sharply

"But I haven't a wife and family either," said Florizel, more bewildered than ever.

"No wife and family? You don't mean you were hatched this year?"

"Of course not; I'm ten years old," said Florizel, huffily.

The other swallow stared at him in silence for a moment, and then turned to a cluster of nests close by, crying, "He hasn't a nest! He's ten years old, and he hasn't a wife and family! He must be mad!" Immediately a crowd of swallows flew out on every side, and surrounding poor Florizel, they cried in chorus, "Peck him! He isn't respectable! He hasn't a wife and family! Peck him!" He tried to escape, but vainly; the air seemed full of bright eyes, sharp beaks, and ruffled feathers, and the more he struggled to find a way out the closer they hemmed him in. His head swam, his senses were leaving him, he felt himself falling—falling—and a far-away voice said: "Wake, Florizel! wake! it's eight o'clock!" Opening his eyes he saw a familiar yet strange face, that of Lady Athené, who leaned over him repeating, "Wake up, Florizel!"

"I am so sorry, my dear boy," she said; "I have been so busy and tired, I forgot all about you, and here you have been for six hours without tea. Come and have some supper with me in my study. Aren't you famished?"

"I say, Lady Athené, you are jolly," said Florizel, getting up and looking at her drowsily. She had come in her hurry without her cap and gown, and had forgotten her blue spectacles, and really, Florizel thought, she was quite young and not half bad looking without them.

"I never meant you to be here so long," said she. "Are you very tired?"

"Well, I've been asleep most of the time," said Florizel. "But I really couldn't do those papers, you know, at least not much of them—still I'll try and do better next term."

Lady Athené stooped and kissed him. "Thank you, dear," she said, "I will ask your father to let you have the wood-carving lessons you wanted, and we shall be better friends in future, I hope. Come along to supper."



THE KING'S RETURN TO THE SUMMER PALACE

Boris

IN days gone by, when dreams came true, before School Boards and steam-engines had driven the fairies from the face of the earth, a little son was born to a King and Queen, who had been married for many years without having a child. To the christening, after the manner of those days, came all the fairies from a hundred miles round, laden with gifts. When the ceremonies were concluded, and all the gifts bestowed, the fairies were seen to be talking together anxiously in groups. Finally, the youngest fairy came forth nervously, and addressed the Queen.

“We have been debating,” she said, “whether it is well to inform your Majesties of something that is written in the stars concerning your son. Finally, we have decided to allow you to choose whether you will hear

it—knowing, nevertheless, that you can do nothing to prevent its fulfilment—or whether you prefer to remain in ignorance.”

The King and Queen, after a little hesitation, decided that they would prefer to know the worst, and the Senior Fairy accordingly gave them a sealed packet, to be opened on the Prince's first birthday. The visitors then took their leave, saying, “We have done what we can for your son; beware how you call for our aid again.”

The year went by uneventfully, and on the first birthday of Prince Boris an extraordinary meeting of the Privy Council was convened, at which the fairies' letter was solemnly opened by the Prime Minister, and read aloud by the Secretary of State. Its contents were brief, if not intelligible :

“Of woman born, a woman still
Shall sway his lot for good or ill.
Misfortune brought by woman's hands
Shall lead his steps to distant lands,
By woman lost, by woman found,
By woman's love his life is crowned.”

“Dear me !” said the King as the Secretary sat down after reading the last words. “There's nothing so very extraordinary

about that. Why, I remember when I was a young man——”

“My dear!” said the Queen reprovingly. “But what shall we do to avert the misfortune?”

“May I recommend,” said the Prime Minister, after a long pause, “that the Astrologer Royal be consulted?”

That functionary was accordingly sent for, and after much searching was found working out an abstruse calculation on the top of a flight of steps in the housemaid’s cupboard, whither he had strayed in search of a feather duster to clean the spider-webs from his best telescope. With some difficulty he was made to comprehend the reason for his being summoned, and condescended to withdraw his mighty intellect from celestial matters and bestow it for an instant on the small morsel of humanity who sat, chuckling and pulling his cat’s tail, in the middle of the Council table.

“It’s quite simple,” he said. “Insulate him. If he never sees a woman he can’t take any harm from one.”

“Well, but for how long?” asked the King.

"For ever," said the astrologer promptly, and fell to his calculations again.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the Queen, who had a seat by courtesy in the Privy Council. "I believe in getting these things over early. Measles, mumps, whooping-cough, whatever it may be, the later you take them the worse they are, and they are bound to come. So is this trouble, for the fairies expressly warned us that it could not be averted."

"No, but by judicious treatment the constitution may be fortified to resist the attacks of the disease," said the Court Physician. "I should recommend that the patient be isolated at least till the age of twenty-one years."

The Queen protested, but her objections were over-ruled by the unanimous vote of the Council. She was only suffered to kiss the child once before seeing him borne away in the arms of the pompous Major-domo, to be placed under the care of the Professor of Anatomy, who being an old bachelor, and a confirmed woman-hater, was adjudged the fittest person to avert the malign female influence.

To insure the complete isolation necessary for the proper carrying out of his system, a thousand workmen were employed to prepare a suitable dwelling for his ward. About twenty miles from the capital city, in the midst of a small dense forest which measured about five miles round, there stood a large hunting lodge, which the King caused to be extended and fitted up as a Royal residence, with gardens around it, containing fishponds, fountains, summer-houses, swings, and everything that the heart of a boy could wish. At the same time a hedge of prickly cactus was planted all round the forest, and as it grows quickly in that climate, by the time the house was ready for its occupant the hedge was ten feet high and three feet thick. Communication with the outer world was carried on by means of double gates heavily barred, guarded by sentries, and only opened at midnight by the Keeper of the Keys. Over this gateway was a notice in large letters, "Any woman found trespassing in this enclosure will be immediately destroyed. By Royal command."

"Surely, your Majesty," said the Chief

Commissioner of Works, as he reported on the completion of the King's arrangements, "such a fence is hardly adequate to defend the enclosure. A strong man could push through it without difficulty."

"You mistake me," said the King. "My object is to keep out not men but women. No woman would attempt to enter by a way which would entail scratching her face and spoiling her clothes."

"Your Majesty's wisdom is incomparable," said the Commissioner bowing low. Yet as he left the presence he might have been heard to mutter, "and still it does not suggest to him that where the gander has gone through the goose may follow!"

Everything being now ready, the infant Prince and his guardian with a sufficient number of attendants were conveyed to the palace, where the following twenty years of his life were to be spent. For greater safety the King only visited him at midnight, when he was usually asleep, so that the Professor was free to carry out his ideas as to the upbringing of children undisturbed. Fortunately for the person most concerned the

Queen had insisted on choosing the head-nurse herself, and had appointed to the office a middle-aged squire of her own, Raimond by name, a man who having been left a widower with five small children, had successfully reared them to manhood. He was, therefore, to be depended on for thorough practical knowledge as to the feeding and clothing of infants, and the treatment of childish ailments.

While the Professor was elaborating a treatise on "The Scientific Adaptation of Diet to the Production of Osseous Tissue," the Prince had triumphantly cut his back teeth on his own thumb; and before his guardian had perfected his grand new "Theory of Human Locomotion," he was running races with the house dog on the terraced walks of his garden, scampering through the woods on a bare-backed pony, climbing trees with the tom-cat, and diving among the swans on the artificial lake behind the palace. His foster-father taught him reading, writing, and the rudiments of arithmetic, on the oldest and most unscientific principles, but except for this he grew up to

the age of twelve without being in the least afflicted by the axioms set forth in the monumental work which the Professor was now completing on—"Boy: his Origin, Development, and Suppression."

When Boris was four years old the Queen (who had never ceased to fret at her separation from him) died, leaving a baby daughter. Overwhelmed with grief the King sank into deep melancholy, withdrew more and more from public life, and at last, leaving his little daughter to the care of nurses and governesses, and his kingdom to a Council of Regency, he retired to one of his distant castles, where he lived like a hermit, lost in study and meditation.

His retirement was suddenly disturbed one day by the arrival of an express messenger, urging his immediate return for important business. A second express following close upon the first announced that misfortune had befallen his son; and before he had fairly started, a third met him disclosing the full truth—Boris was lost, and no one knew what had become of him.

The King travelled all night and arrived

at the Summer Palace in the early morning to find the great gates standing open, the sentries dispersed, the Professor tearing his long grey beard, and the faithful nurse haggard with grief and weariness, extinguishing the torch with which all night through he had been searching every nook and corner of the plantation. Neither of them could tell him anything, save that two days previously Boris had gone out with one of his pages to snare rabbits, and the page had presently returned alone in tears, saying that the Prince had run away from him and could not be found. Since then nothing had been seen or heard of the truant, in spite of the closest search, and they were now beginning to think that he must have found means to pass the barrier and escape into the open country.

So little interest had the King taken in the affairs of his family since the death of his wife, that he had almost forgotten his reasons for shutting up his son in such an unusual manner. Now, however, the fairies' warning returned to his memory. "A woman has done this!" he cried.

“Impossible!” said the Professor. “The cactus fence is now ten feet thick, and the gates have not been open for three months. Also the sentinels are all carefully selected woman-haters, six of them being convicted wife-beaters, and the other six old bachelors.”

“Nevertheless,” said the King, “let the neighbourhood be carefully searched, and anything wearing a petticoat within two miles be brought before us.”

These measures resulted in the return of the search-party, bearing with them the only suspicious character to be found within a two-mile radius. This was a little ragged goat-girl, who had been found hiding among her goats in a deserted sheep-pen. Her hair and clothes were full of dry cactus spines, and her face and hands covered with scratches. At first she could only shiver and sob and beg for mercy, but at last she confessed how, some weeks previously, having lost one of her goats, she had followed its traces up to the cactus edge, and found that it had broken a passage through the lower branches, which were at that point decayed and brittle. Fearing the wrath of her master if she

returned without the goat, she had crawled on hands and knees through the tunnel it had made, and found herself at last in the forbidden enclosure, where she saw it nibbling the green shoots of the young trees. Driving it before her she went back to her flock ; but curiosity led her to return again and again, until on the fateful morning she had been discovered by Boris, whose interest had been roused by the sight of what he took to be an odd sort of new boy. On finding that she was that unknown and noxious creature, a girl, he had threatened to give her up to the sentries for immediate execution unless she showed him how she got in. As soon as she pointed out the passage he crawled through it eagerly, and although she followed as fast as she could she never saw him again. When she came into open daylight no living creature was in sight except a grey dove, which flew swiftly through the air, followed by a hawk.

Once more the King despatched mounted messengers to every corner of the kingdom, offering vast rewards to any one who would bring tidings of the missing boy, but days and weeks went by without news, and he lost

all hope. The hedge was burnt down, the palace deserted, the garden suffered to fall into desolation. The Professor left the country, and Raimond attached himself to the household of Princess Nadine, where he found ample employment, for the King, roused from his apathy, had resumed the cares of government, and with them his paternal duties. The Princess was now a bright, pretty little maid of eight, tall and sturdy, and closely resembling her lost brother, both in looks and character.

Fearing that she might be his only heir the King had her instructed in everything thought fitting in those days for a King's son. In addition to graver studies she learned to run and leap, to ride and fence, to hunt and hawk, to wield lance and crossbow ; she sat by her father's side in the Council, and accompanied him on his progress through the country. Dearly as she loved her father the life was a lonely one for a young girl, and she often longed for the brother of whom old Raimond, now her favoured attendant, was for ever talking, but whose face she had never seen.

So the years went by, until Nadine was a tall, handsome girl of seventeen. Going to receive her father's birthday greeting she found him sad and silent, absorbed in studying a parchment scroll which lay before him. After she had waited for some minutes he raised his eyes and called her to his side.

"You wonder why I have no joy in your birthday?" he said. "Remember, it is also the twenty-first birthday of my son. Until to-day I have hoped against hope for tidings of him, but nine years have now gone by without a sign, and I fear he is dead. Yet surely the prophecy seems to speak of his return," and he signed to her to read the scroll. She did so in silence, and then repeated the last two lines aloud:

"By woman lost, by woman found,
By woman's love his life is crowned."

"Sire!" she cried, "I am a woman."

"You a woman? Well, maybe," said the King smiling. "What then?"

"It was for fear of a woman that he was shut up so long; it was by a woman, or a girl, at least, that he was lost; the rest of the

prophecy remains—‘by woman found.’ Why not I, as well as another?”

“What can you do, brave woman?” said her father more seriously. “The world is wide, and you are not too large to be lost in it.”

“Let me go and seek my brother, nevertheless,” said Nadine, kneeling at his feet and speaking earnestly. “I am tall enough to pass for a man; let me ride out as a young knight errant, with Raimond for a squire, and deliver Boris from the enchantment which holds him captive.”

“I will think of it,” said the King absently; “but which way do you think of going?”

“Raimond has often told me that the dove and the hawk which the goat-girl saw flew straight towards the setting sun. I too will ride westward,” said Nadine.

Finding that her heart was set upon her project, and half inclined to believe that she had indeed hit upon the true solution of the prediction, the King caused his armourer to bring out the light hauberk and helmet which he himself had worn as a youth, and the

sword which he had hoped that his son might wear. The rest of Nadine's equipment was soon provided, and a week later the maiden knight mounted her black horse and rode forth from the palace gates at early dawn, followed by her squire. Outside the city walls an old beggar woman started up as if to beg alms, but vanished again after pressing something into the girl's hands. It was a mirror of polished silver, no larger than a crown piece, slung on a fine chain, and Nadine hung it round her neck, wondering what the gift might portend.

A few days hard riding brought them to the western boundary of the kingdom, and then as they rested by the evening camp-fire, Nadine absently drew out the little mirror, polished it with her glove, and looked at her own face reflected in it by the firelight. Suddenly she saw, with a start, that though the face which looked at her from the silver disc was oddly like her own, it was not hers. The short curling brown hair, the blue eyes, the straight dark brows, the rounded chin were hers, but the blank, unseeing gaze, the pale, sunken cheeks, these were not what her

mirror was wont to show her, and she involuntarily put her hand to her mouth to assure herself that no moustache was actually growing there.

“Raimond!” she cried eagerly, “what was my brother like?”

“When we lost him he was but for the difference of years your very marrow,” said the squire, “hair, eyes, features, voice—I could think you were he.”

Again Nadine looked at the mirror, but its surface was dull and reflected nothing, not even her own face. As she slept that night, however, she dreamed of a long, lonely road ending in a narrow mountain pass, which was guarded by a solitary figure on horse-back, a young man in simple peasant dress with a grey dove's wing in his cap, and when after long striving she saw his face, it was that which the mirror had shown her. She woke full of hope, and told the squire what had happened.

“It is a sign,” he said, “and I do not doubt that your mirror will be our guide.” It was not long before this proved true, for when the road divided and they were in doubt

which way to take, the mirror reflected one way clearly and became quite dull when turned to the other, so that they followed the former. In this manner the days went by, not without adventures and perils of which we have no time to tell. Every night Nadine saw the same face in the mirror and dreamed the same dream, and at last, after long journeying, she found herself riding up the steep mountain pass of her vision.

She was hardly prepared for what followed. The solitary sentinel appeared at the highest point of the pass and immediately fitted a bolt to his crossbow and fired. Nadine was struck and fell from her horse : Raimond dismounted and ran to help her, forgetting the stranger, who advanced and looked down into the girlish face under the silver helmet, and continued gazing as if in a dream.

The wound was only slight, and Nadine presently opened her eyes, looked up, and saw the face already familiar to her in her dreams, regarding her with a bewildered stare like one bewitched.

"This is your brother, I know him by a hundred signs," said Raimond, as he helped

her to rise, "but I fear the enchantment is on him still. I have changed little in these nine years, but he does not know me."

Chilled and half-disappointed the Princess approached Boris, who had also dismounted, and stood leaning against his horse. Taking both his hands in hers, and saying "Brother!" she kissed him on the cheek. Instantly the sky darkened, a tremendous shock of earthquake shook the ground, great blocks of stone were loosened from the mountain side and rolled down, filling up the passage by which Boris had approached. When the sky cleared and the noise subsided, Nadine found her brother's arms around her.

"I have forgotten so much!" he said. "So many years I have guarded this pass, and known nothing except that I must drive away intruders. Now things are becoming clear—I remember my home and my dear nurse there—but even yet I cannot recall that I had a brother, though my heart leaps at your voice."

"I am your sister," said Nadine laughing and blushing. "Only a woman's hand could set you free, and for want of a better mine

has served. But now let us ride, for a long journey lies before us, and there will be time enough before we reach home to tell all that has happened since we lost you."

Boris's story is soon told. He had only vague and fragmentary recollections of what had happened to him since, on leaving the wood, he had found himself flying through the air, pursued by an unknown enemy. His father's direst foe, the Wizard King of the land which they were now leaving behind them, had used his magic arts to lead the little goat-herd through the barrier and draw Boris out into the open plain, where his charms could take effect. Having brought him to his own kingdom, the enchanter had laid a spell on him which caused him to forget his former life, and set him to guard the mountain pass by which alone his country could be entered. Here he had grown to manhood in utter unconsciousness of all except his daily round of duty, until the day of his deliverance came.

The joy of the old King may be imagined when, after many weary months of waiting, his beloved daughter returned, bringing with

her the son whom he had mourned as dead. As the news of their arrival spread through the land universal rejoicings were held, and the people flocked in crowds to behold their future King. Boris himself was at first troubled and downcast.

"I have no right to the heirship," he said sadly to Nadine, "I am ignorant of all that befits a Prince: you have brought me home only to supplant you in an office that you would fill better than I."

"We will bear the burden together," said his sister. "Fate has decreed that a woman shall rule your life—let it be your sister, for a time at least. When the day comes for the last words of the prophecy to be fulfilled, and another woman holds sway in your heart—when you have learnt your task, and need me no more—I can but mount my horse and ride forth once more as a knight errant, to win—who knows? perhaps a kingdom for myself."

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SHE was certainly a very unhappy little girl.

The old farm kitchen was a pleasant enough place, with its low-raftered roof and wainscoted walls, hung with pots and pans that shone like mirrors in the sunshine, and yet it would have been hard to find a more miserable face than that of the child who sat in the middle of the floor that autumn afternoon, and cried till she could cry no longer. She was all alone ; every one had gone to the fair in a neighbouring village, and even the cat, her usual playfellow, had slipped out to see a friend at the next farm ; so there was no one to care whether she laughed or cried.

“It is too bad,” she sobbed. “Nobody loves me. A real father and mother wouldn’t have left me all alone while they went to

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enjoy themselves." And yet at that very moment her adopted mother was saying to her husband regretfully, "I wish after all we had brought the little maid with us. Perhaps she would have been better-tempered tomorrow. It grieves me so to punish her—and yet what can one do with a child that never says a pleasant word, or does what she is told without grumbling from morning to night?"

"It's not that we don't love her enough," said the farmer, "but she won't let us show it. Well, we must be patient—she is but a child, after all."

Meanwhile, Susie sobbed softly to herself at intervals, until her attention was distracted by seeing a little brown mouse creep cautiously out of a hole beside the fireplace. After dodging backward and forward several times, it came right out into the middle of the kitchen, where it sat and looked at her.

"Oh, mousie, how I wish you could talk!" said the little girl at last.

"Who told you I couldn't?" said the mouse in a shrill squeak, which made her

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jump. She was quite dumbfounded at the unexpected reply ; and after waiting a minute the mouse went on—" I was always told that it is good manners to speak when you are spoken to ! "

" You never spoke to me before," said Susie, finding her voice at last.

" I should think not, when you've always got that ill-bred cat running after you," retorted the mouse. " I'm very particular what company I keep."

" Don't you like cats? I do," said the child.

" Then I wonder at your taste," said mousie. " Cats have low ways. A relative of mine once set up housekeeping with a cat, and they had a trifling dispute over a pot of dripping." She stopped, and sighed deeply.

" Well, what happened? " said Susie.

" My relative received injuries which terminated in her death."

" Did you go to the funeral? " asked Susie sleepily, not being able to think of any other remark.

" *There wasn't any funeral,*" said the mouse in a hollow tone, and there was a

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painful silence for a few moments, after which she resumed: "So the two families have never visited since. Now tell me about *your* relations.

"I haven't any," said Susie, beginning to cry again. "The farmer found me on the common where the gipsies had been camping eight years ago. I was only about two years old then, and I can't remember it. I have lived here as long as I can recollect."

"Don't they give you enough to eat?" said the mouse.

"Of course they do," said Susie in astonishment.

"Perhaps they bite you, then—or scratch you?"

"No, indeed they don't," said Susie indignantly.

"Then why do you cry?" said the mouse. "Are they unkind to you?"

"N—no," said Susie reluctantly. "I suppose they don't mean to be. But they aren't my own parents, you see."

"Are *you* unkind to them?" asked the mouse sharply. Susie didn't quite like this question, and shirked it.

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"I am very unhappy," she said. "They have all gone to the fair and left me at home."

"You needn't tell me why—I know," said the mouse. "It was a punishment for ill-temper and disobedience. I was listening; and if one of my own children had behaved so, I would have kept her on mouldy cheese-parings for a week."

Susie cried harder than ever at this, and the mouse, who was a kind little body, sat looking at her and scratching her own ears in a perplexed way.

"I know what's the matter with you!" she cried at last, so suddenly that Susie started. "You want to see the harvest fairies dance."

"There aren't any fairies," said Susie crossly, from the sheer habit of contradiction, not because she had any real opinion on the subject.

"Oh, very well," said the mouse. "Good day!" and she turned as if to go into her hole.

This did not suit Susie. "Come back, please," she said. "I mean, I never saw any fairies."

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"I could have told you that," said the mouse.

"And I don't know what good it would do me if I did see them."

"Well, all I know is that children who have seen the fairies dance are always bright and happy, which you never are, and never will be, to judge by appearances;" and the mouse smoothed her whiskers with an offended air.

"Please don't quarrel with me, for I really want to be friends," said the child, drying her tears and trying to look pleasant. It wasn't so difficult as you may think, for she had a round face that would have been merry if it had not usually been drawn out as long as a fiddle, and brown eyes that would have danced if they had not nearly always been full of tears. Her voice was so pathetic that the good little mouse forgot her resentment.

"There are three nights in every year when the fairies dance," she said. "The first is the eve of May Day, the second the eve of Midsummer Day, and the third the eve of Michaelmas Day, when they dance in the harvest-fields. That is just a week from to-day."

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"Shall I be able to see them?" said Susie eagerly.

"On one condition," replied the mouse, "and that is, that you don't speak a single cross word during the whole week."

Susie's face grew long again, as she realised how many cross words she was in the habit of saying. "It's no good, then," she said mournfully.

"Never say die, so long as there's cheese in the larder," returned mousie cheerfully. "I'll help you if you'll try. I will remind you by scratching your foot whenever I see you are getting cross, and it will grow easier as you get on."

"You dear little thing!" cried Susie gratefully. "And when the week is ended, what then?"

"Why, then, if you have kept the condition, you may go out at midnight into the five-acre field, which is to be reaped next week. There you must hide yourself behind the biggest stook, and if the moon is bright you will see the fairies. But when you do see them, mind you don't laugh aloud, whatever happens, or I can't answer for the conse-

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quences." She ceased, her whiskers twitched nervously, and without another word she vanished into her hole.

When the farmer's wife returned home, tired out, expecting to find a dark kitchen with a sulky or tearful child, she was pleasantly surprised to be met on the doorstep by a neat, even though rather solemn, little person, and to see a bright fire, a hissing kettle, a clean-swept hearth, and a nicely laid tea-table. She was so astonished and delighted that Susie could not help cheering up, and being pleased with the pretty gifts that both father and mother had brought her, and the evening passed without her ever needing the reminder of her watchful little friend.

Next morning she was up betimes ready to help her mother in various tasks about the house. All went well until it was time to start for school. Absorbed in feeding the chickens she had forgotten the hour, and when she went to get her books and sun-bonnet she saw that she was ten minutes late. An angry complaint against every one in general for not calling her was on the tip of her tongue, when a sharp little scratch on

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her foot made her start and keep silence. When she got to school all the rest were assembled, so that she had to take her place at the bottom of the class, and hear her neighbours whispering, "Sulky Susie is late to-day, she won't like being down here."

The little brown mouse must have hidden herself somewhere in Susie's dinner-basket, for the warning scratch never failed to come when a provoking speech from a schoolfellow, or an undeserved reproof from the cross old dame who kept the school, tried her temper to the uttermost.

The day wore through somehow, and the little girl ran home, feeling perhaps for the first time the comfort of returning to a mother whose love and tenderness never failed, and whose scoldings never came undeserved. The farmer's wife, seeing she was tired, was even kinder than usual; and Susie went to bed at last, happy in the thought that so far, at least, she had not forfeited her right to see the fairies dance.

It would take too long to tell all the story of that week, and Susie's efforts to obey the mouse's orders. I cannot say that she was

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never cross, for bad habits cannot be got rid of all at once; but the little scratch always came in time to stop the angry or fretful words; and though Susie grew so silent and subdued that her mother thought she was going to be ill, the end of the week arrived without mishap, and she made ready hopefully for her new experience.

She went to bed as usual on Michaelmas Eve, and was wakened at the appointed time by her little friend tickling her nose with her own long tail, so that she sneezed violently. "Make haste, Susie," squeaked mousie. "No time to lose. Put thick shoes on, and a warm cloak, for the night is frosty."

Only half awake she scrambled out of bed, dressed herself hurriedly by the light of the harvest moon that streamed through her diamond-paned window. "Take me with you, Susie!" said the mouse, scrambling into one of her cloak pockets. "Now let us be off," and Susie stole cautiously down the stairs, through the dark passage to the back door. The key turned noiselessly in the lock, and she hurried out of the door, down the footpath, out of the garden-gate, and so

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through the winding lanes to the five-acre field.

All the corn had been cut and tied, and ranged in stooks of twelve sheaves each, ready to be carried away next day. In the middle of the field was a great stook of fourteen sheaves, in which Susie hid herself, squeezing in between them, and crouching down on the dry stubble. Here she was protected from the cold, and quite concealed from the sight of any one entering the field.

So comfortable was she that she was almost asleep again when suddenly the mouse jumped out of her cloak and ran up her shoulder. "Watch!" she squeaked. "Here they come!"

A little cloud had drifted over the moon, but in the dim light Susie could see what looked like a dark stream flowing in and out among the shocks of corn. As it came nearer, the cloud passed, and she could see a long procession of field mice, marching on their hind legs four abreast. In the clear space opposite her hiding-place they stopped, formed into a circle, and uplifted their tiny voices in a shrill wail.

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"They are sorrowing for their homes, which the reapers have destroyed," said Susie's friend. "See, the rats come next, and they are rejoicing because they hope to make snug winter nests in the corn ricks." The ring of mice had broken up, and a host of brown rats appeared, dancing and leaping, and showing every sign of joy.

All at once their gambols ceased as a sweet shrill note, like that of a bugle blown miles away on a summer afternoon, sounded in Susie's ears, and she saw them form in two long lines, three or four feet apart. Then two twinkling greenish lights advanced between their ranks, followed by others, until every one of the rats had a tiny torch-bearer standing before him. In a moment or two the torches burnt with a clear steady light, so that the whole field was as bright as day, and Susie could see that each was borne by an elf seven inches high, dressed in green, and wearing on his head an acorn-cup, adorned with a red plume. Each held in one hand a spike of crimson-belled heather taller than himself, and with the other held his flaming torch high above his head.

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Now a sudden outburst of the sweetest far-away music you can possibly imagine made Susie quiver with excitement and lean so far forward that the mouse gave her a warning scratch. A row of twelve elves, dressed like the first but carrying long green brooms, ran forward between the two rows of torch-bearers, sweeping the ground before them as they ran. As they swept the rough stubble vanished, and a carpet of delicate moss grew up, smooth as velvet, and fine as a weasel's fur. After these walked sedately the fairy trumpeters, buglers, and pipers, in russet and gold, playing with all their might. Next came, three and three, a troop of elf-maidens dancing along hand in hand; and behind them, in a shining crystal car, the Fairy Queen herself, in a flowing gossamer robe bordered and girdled with tiny diamonds, and a spiked crown of diamonds on her golden hair.

The whole procession wound three times round the field, finally halting not far from where Susie sat. The Fairy Queen raised her wand, and the throng of elves scattered themselves over the field, dancing in and out,

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pelting each other with loose grains of corn, fencing with straws, hiding among the sheaves, and finally collecting in a wide ring round the Queen, and the central stook where the child was hidden.

Then the Queen raised her wand once more, and the strangest thing of all happened. All the corn sheaves in the field outside the ring stood upright, shook themselves, and solemnly forming into sets of twenty-four, began sedately to dance country-dances. Thud, thud—flop, flop—up in the middle and down again; while Susie first rubbed her eyes, then, unheeding the mouse's remonstrances, crept out of her shelter to see them better. Soon forgetting everything else in her surprise and amusement at seeing the unwieldy things bridling and strutting, bowing and curtseying, she burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. Instantly the torches went out, a cloud covered the moon, and with one startled cry the elves fled or vanished.

After wandering round and round the field in the dark for half an hour, vainly trying to find the gate, the little girl wrapped her cloak about her and sat down by the wall. Here

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she was found by the farmer when he came to his work at six o'clock the next morning, and so soundly was she sleeping that he carried her back to the house without waking her, and laid her on the settle by the kitchen fire.

"Walking in her sleep, poor lassie," were the first words she heard. "I've thought this week past that she wasn't well."

"I'll give her a treacle posset and a hot bath, and put her to bed," said the voice of the farmer's wife. "Just see, her cloak is white with hoar frost."

"I'm all right," Susie tried to say, but a sudden recollection of her last waking experience made her break into such a peal of merry laughter that the kitchen rafters rang, and her mother in alarm, thinking she must be delirious hurried her off to bed.

After spending a whole day and night there, however, she seemed none the worse, and was quite her old self again, but with one great difference. All her ill-temper and dulness were gone as if by magic ; her feet as she ran about the house seemed to be keep-

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ing time (as indeed they were) to fairy music. Her face was constantly dimpling with smiles, and her eyes sparkled with good-humour. No one knew why, for the little brown mouse had forbidden her to tell.

“Never let any one know what you have seen,” she said, as she sat on Susie’s pillow the night after the adventure. “I am going away, and there will be no one to remind you, so remember this—if ever you try to tell the fairies’ secret you will forget all about it, and then—*then* you will be as cross as ever. But if you keep it, you will be rewarded by the favour of the Fairy Queen.”

The farmer never guessed why his crops after this were always so plentiful, his oxen so fat, his fleeces so heavy; his wife set down entirely to her own good management the quantity of milk her cows gave, the amount of butter that it yielded, and the number of eggs that her hens laid all through the winter. But both of them agreed that the greatest of all their blessings was the little daughter whom they fondly called no longer “Sulky Susie” but “Princess Sunbeam.”



ROBIN FINDS ROSABELLE ASLEEP IN FAIRYLAND

The Four-Leaved Clover

IT was Midsummer Day at noon. The sky was cloudless, and the sun shone so hotly that Robin, the blacksmith's son, took refuge in the only shady spot he could find, underneath the spreading branches of the great sycamore that grew beside the village pond. A stately swan floated on the still water half a dozen yards away from him ; at the further side a goose was grubbing for food for her young ones, and a group of white ducks were sunning themselves on the bank, apparently asleep. Suddenly a harsh piercing cry was heard, and a flash of blue and gold passed by Robin as a peacock flew over the boundary wall which divided the Manor Park from the village green, alighting almost at his feet. The newcomer strutted to the edge of the water and called to the swan, who thereupon paddled slowly towards him.

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"I wish I knew what they are saying to each other!" said Robin, half aloud. Now it was Midsummer Day, and moreover it was Robin's birthday, and children born on Midsummer Day are specially protected by the fairies. So it is not astonishing that Robin's wish was gratified, and almost before he finished speaking he heard the swan say :

"Good day, Beauty! Is all well at the Manor?"

"Good day, Lady Blanche," said the peacock. "No, I'm sorry to say things are looking very dark with us just now. Little Rosabelle, the only child of the Lord and Lady of the Manor, is very ill, and the doctors say that unless some change takes place before night she will die."

"What is the matter with her?" asked the goose, who had splashed up to hear what was going on, for she dearly loved a gossip, "Surely with only one child to manage they might keep her well. What would they do if they had a dozen all the same age, like me?"

"No one seems to know what ails her," said the peacock. "But *I* know. The fairies

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are angry because she broke all the eggs out of a wren's nest that the gardener's boy gave her. It wasn't her fault, poor little girl—how should a four year-old baby know that they might be birds some day, and that the mother would fret nearly to death for the loss of them? It would be better to punish that stupid boy, for he knew what he was doing."

"But, perhaps, he only meant to be kind to her," suggested Mother Goose.

"Kind indeed! I know better," retorted the peacock. "All boys are cruel. Why, I daren't show myself in the village during the winter and spring, when I've got my best tail on; I should be plucked alive."

"Ah, that's nothing when you're used to it," said the goose meditatively. "It does spoil one's appearance, I'll admit."

"There are some kind boys, though," said a plump white duck who had joined the party. "Look at Robin there—he never hurts animals, and he's a boy."

"There are *some* white peacocks, and *some* black swans," said the swan, "but that doesn't alter the fact that swans are usually white and peacocks blue."

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“Blue, do you call it?” interposed the peacock bending his graceful head to look at himself in the water. “Iridescent, I should say.”

“What a word—why, it’s as long as my neck,” said the swan. “Anyhow, it seems to me that in this case the fairies are more cruel than the boys, to kill a little child and make her parents wretched.”

“They should have taught her better,” said the peacock severely. “But she won’t really die. The fairies have taken her away and put an elf-child in her place. Unless some one born on Midsummer Day can find his way to Fairyland and bring her back before the changeling dies, the fairies will keep her there for no one knows how long.”

Robin pricked his ears at this. Little Rosabelle had been born at the same time as his baby sister who died before she was a month old, and his mother had nursed her, so that he felt as if she were half a sister too. Whenever she came riding through the village on her sleek fat donkey the groom who led it would pause for a moment by the

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smithy door, while Robin's mother came out to speak to her nurse-child, and remark how bonny she was growing ; and Robin himself would offer her a nosegay of flowers out of his own garden, or a basket of the tiny eggs laid by his bantam hens. Also the Lady of the Manor had been kind to Robin in many ways, and had promised that he should be Rosabelle's own groom and man-servant as soon as he was old enough. He could not bear to think of the grief that the child's loss would cause.

"I was born on Midsummer Day," he cried, springing to his feet. "Please tell me how I can get to Fairyland?"

Instantly the whole conclave dispersed. The swan spread her strong wings and flew right across the green ; the peacock took refuge on the topmost branch of the sycamore ; and the ducks dived under water, leaving only Mother Goose vainly striving to collect her scattered brood. Quick as thought the boy caught a gosling in either hand, and cried "Now, old lady ! Just tell me what I ask, or I'll keep your children !"

"I can't tell you, it's against the law," said

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the goose. "Do give me my precious babies back!"

"If you don't tell me at once you'll never see them again," said Robin. "Now then!" and he put a gosling in either pocket and caught two more.

"The gates of Fairyland are where the four-leaved clover grows," cried the goose desperately, "and I can't tell you any more, not if you stuff me! O, dear, dear boy, do consider the feelings of a mother!"

Robin restored the goslings to the water and reluctantly turned towards his own home. Clover enough he could find, whole fields of it; but in all the twelve years of his life he had never seen a four-leaved clover. His mother was the wisest person he knew—perhaps she could help him.

She was busy making bread, but she paused to consider the question. "Four-leaved clover?" she said, "I never heard of it. Stay though—I remember when we were children and used to talk of the things we would do when we got old, my grannie would sometimes say, 'Well and good, little ones; but remember that the four-leaved clover grows

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oftenest in the old potato patch.' It was only a saying, I doubt," and she returned to her baking.

"How can the gates of Fairyland be in our potato patch?" thought Robin. "I'll look there, just because I don't know where else to look; but I'm afraid it's no use, and what shall we do if Rosabelle is lost for good?"

Robin soon found that the only way to search the potato patch thoroughly was to weed it row by row. The afternoon sun burnt fiercely on his back, the perspiration rolled off his face, the stooping made him giddy, the stones cut his hands, and the thick stems of the weeds made his fingers sore, but he toiled on till fully two-thirds of the work was done. Then he gave a joyful shout. The four-leaved clover was in his hand.

He held it for awhile in perplexity, for the gates of Fairyland seemed no nearer than before. As he pondered a pair of starlings began to talk on the wall close by, and he found that his fairy gift had not left him, for he understood every word.

"Look at that silly fellow," said one, "He's found the four-leaved clover, and he doesn't know what to do with it."

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"I suppose no one ever told him that to get to Fairyland one must always go 'widdershins,'" said the other.

"And even if you told him he wouldn't know that 'widdershins' means the opposite way to the sun," said the first; and they both flew away.

Now Robin knew that the sun went from east to west, so he at once set off to walk round the potato-field from west to east. He walked round it once and nothing happened, so he set off again, and again without result. "Third time pays for all" he said to himself, and started again. This time his perseverance was rewarded. Before he had gone half-way round, a wonderful change came over everything, and he knew he was in Fairyland.

Instead of the potato-field and the meadows beyond he saw around him the trees of a forest, but such a forest as he had never seen. The trees were quite strange to him, and were wonderfully beautiful and stately: gorgeous flowers blossomed beneath his feet, delicate creepers hung from every branch, and a little brook which rippled close by threw showers of tiny pearls on the ferns

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overhanging its waters, while its pools were full of gold and silver fish. No living thing was to be seen among the trees except the squirrels who sprang from bough to bough and dropped nutshells on his head, yet the whole wood seemed full of life. Whichever way he turned he was greeted by bursts of silvery laughter, tiny hands pulled at his clothes, and the sound of sweet voices, singing in chorus, led him from spot to spot in a vain attempt to discover the singers.

At last, in despair, he sat down beside the brook, and putting the clover leaf into his pocket for safety he washed his hands, which were soiled with earth and bleeding with cuts and scratches. The water was so cool and refreshing that he presently stooped to bathe his face and eyes in it. When he rose and looked about him again he found that the magic water had strengthened his sight, and he saw that the wood was crowded with airy figures clothed in green no higher than his knee ; and he also perceived that he had seen them all along, but had taken their dresses for ferns or large-leaved plants, and their golden hair for brilliant yellow flowers.

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No sooner had this become clear to him than a sudden cry of "He sees! He sees!" broke from the fairy crowd, and in the twinkling of an eye all were gone, and the wood was as silent as an empty church.

Robin now thought once more of the magic clover, and took it in his hand. He soon noticed that whichever way he turned the odd fourth leaflet always pointed one way. Following this direction he turned down a narrow mossy path that wound in and out between the trees, until at last it ended in a little green bower formed by the interlacing of their branches. Here, in a golden hammock slung between two rose-bushes, lay a pretty child sleeping—Rosabelle herself.

No time was to be lost, for though the sun shone brightly overhead in the fairy forest Robin knew that it must be late afternoon in the world he had left. He tried to waken the little lady, but in vain; he endeavoured to lift her, but his arms seemed to have lost their strength. Finally, he touched her lips with the four-leaved clover.

Instantly there came a tremendous clap of thunder, followed by total darkness. As

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light gradually returned Robin saw that he was once more in the potato patch, and Rosabelle had vanished. As he gazed around him in bewilderment, wondering if it were not all a dream, he heard his mother calling and ran home quickly.

"Where have you been since noon?" she said, "Here's grand news from the Manor. One of the grooms has been in to say that the little darling has waked up as bright and fresh as if she'd never been ill, and the doctors say she is sure to get well again."

"It seems like a miracle almost," said the blacksmith, "but, there, doctors can do anything nowadays!" But Robin knew better.

"It is really very hard on that boy," said Mother Goose, as the gossips gathered that evening on the edge of the pond to talk over the news that the peacock brought.

"It *is* too bad," said the duck. "Rosabelle would be dead by now but for him, and yet those doctors get the praise, and he don't get so much as a 'thank-you!'"

"Virtue is its own reward, I suppose," said the swan crossly, stiffening her long neck

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until it looked like a rolling-pin more than anything else.

“ It isn't the only reward either,” said the peacock. “ Just think what Robin has gained. He knows the language of birds ; he has found the four-leaved clover ; and his eyes have been washed in the fairy spring. He will be a great man one day.”

Both speakers were correct. Robin desired no other reward than the knowledge that Rosabelle was restored to her parents, and was growing better and stronger every day ; but the other reward followed in course of time. The fund of knowledge he seemed to possess of all wild creatures, and his curious insight into their ways, became the talk of the country-side. At last it reached the ears of the Lord of the Manor, who made inquiries for himself, and finding how strangely the lad was gifted, sent him to a good school and afterwards to College. And so it happened that in years to come he became a famous naturalist. All the village took pride in his achievements, but only the gossips on the green knew that all his good fortune dated from Midsummer Day, and the finding of the four-leaved clover.

The Frost-King's Daughter

FAR away in the Frozen North, further than the boldest explorer has yet penetrated, the Frost-King has his dwelling. Even should men some day light upon his palace, no one would ever be the wiser, for to human eyes it is only a shapeless pile of huge, fantastic blocks of ice ; yet within are long corridors and vast cavernous halls, beautiful beyond all imagining, with their high vaulted roofs of deep blue or clear green ice, and walls of sparkling crystal, reflected in the shining floors. Without may reign the long Arctic night, but within darkness is unknown ; for in the midst of the palace stands the Frost-King's throne, from whose jewelled canopy streams a radiance, changing in colour like the Northern Lights, but soft and unwavering in its brilliance.

There sits the grey old King, and marks

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the feeble efforts that men make to intrude into his secrets. With one wave of his sceptre, an impenetrable wall is raised around his realms, and the invaders retreat baffled, despairing, perhaps dying. The white bears and walruses are his soldiers, the seals and Arctic foxes his scouts; his high roads are the great glaciers, and on the sea he has a fleet of mighty icebergs more terrible than a navy of ironclads. By means of these from time to time he is able to deal destruction to the ships of his enemy, the King of the South; but he himself can only direct the warfare from afar, for if once he steps outside the Arctic circle his power is gone. So he sits at home in his lonely palace, and weeps icy tears as he thinks of the treasure which the King of the South has reft from him—his only daughter, Princess Stella.

She was ever of a bold and adventurous nature, and loved to scour the frozen plains in her sledge of walrus-tusks, drawn by twenty-four silver-horned reindeer. The great white she-bear, who had been her foster-mother, never left her side, and she

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herself was wise, as befitted her father's daughter and pupil, so that he had no fear for her safety ; and when one day she begged his leave to cross the plains of ice and travel down to the open sea, he only hesitated from the thought of the lonely days that must go by before her return. His Queen, Stella's mother, had died many years before—she had been born in a warmer land, and the icy northern air had gradually numbed all her powers until at last it froze her very heart, and not even the touch of her infant daughter could thaw it back to life.

The old King was reminded of her now, as Stella knelt at his feet, her golden-brown locks falling over her shoulders till they touched the ground, as she looked up at him with clear blue eyes like her mother's. " I cannot spare thee, child," he said, with as much tenderness as his gruff, hoarse voice could express. " Thou art all that is left to me, and I can scarcely bear thee out of my sight."

" I am so weary, father," sighed the Princess. " At night I dream of other lands—of hills and valleys, all soft and green, not

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bleak and white like these ; most of all, I dream of a great tossing plain of blue water which must be the sea, though my waking eyes have never seen it. I am weary of the endless ice and snow ; let me once look upon the ocean that bounds your kingdom, and I will come back home and be content."

"I can refuse thee nothing," said the King. "Go then, but take old Ursula with thee—she has lived on the shore, and knows its dangers. When thou hast seen all thou wilt, then return without delay, for I am growing old, and thou art the very light of my eyes."

The Princess joyfully gave the promise he asked, and hastened away to prepare for her journey. By the King's orders, two swift-running foxes were sent before as pioneers to make ready a road over the ice by which her sleigh might pass. As they ran, the piled-up masses of ice split asunder and fell back to right and left, while a smooth, broad way appeared underfoot ; sometimes, where the fantastic cliffs were mountain-high, a tunnel was opened through the midst of them — an arched cavern, which led straight on to where the ice-fields lay open

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again. Now the road passed over firm land, where grey rocks rose above the frozen plains, and at last, striking into the track of a glacier, followed its downward course, bridging over crevasses, clearing away boulders, till the way lay fair and smooth from the North Pole to the open sea. Such is the might of the great Frost-King.

Their task performed, the two unwearied scouts returned to their master's dwelling, and told him that all was made ready as he had commanded. Then the King called for a royal escort of a hundred Polar bears to accompany his daughter and keep her in safety; and a formidable bodyguard they appeared, as they stood waiting in marching order, four deep.

But the Princess was independent, not to say wilful. "Do you wish me to be away for years, father mine?" she asked, as she saw the company of grim warriors. "My reindeer run as fast as a bird on the wing, but if they must keep pace with these cumbrous soldiers of yours, I fear we shall never reach our journey's end. If I take old Ursula, surely she is guardian enough."

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"Well, be it so," said her father. "Yet, go as swiftly as thou canst, it will take thee ten days to reach the sea, and each day I must have tidings of thy safety. Here are twelve ptarmigan, each in a leash. Every day thou must let one fly, and when it returns to the palace I shall know all is well. Only this bird with the golden collar keep safe until thou art about to return : then let it fly to tell me that thou wilt soon be in my arms again. One thing more; lest thou shouldst sicken and droop in the warmer air, take this ruby girdle that was thy mother's. There is a spell on it, and though it did not avail to keep her with us, its power may be greater outside the circle where mine is paramount. And now, farewell!"

He kissed her forehead, and then, with bowed head, turned back to the palace, while Stella, who was already seated in her sledge, gave the word for departure. Old Ursula lay at her feet, the old gnome who drove the reindeer sat beside her, and the twelve snowy birds, tethered to her wrist, circled round her head or perched upon her shoulders.

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The long day of the Arctic summer had just begun ; the sun shone on the silver horns of the reindeer and lit up the Frost-King's realm with a brilliance intolerable to unaccustomed eyes. Hour after hour the sledge flew on, so swiftly that the strongest racehorse could not have overtaken it. Each night a tent was pitched in the shade of some ice-cavern, for in the Arctic summer the sun never sets. Every morning one of the ptarmigan was set free to bear back to the King news of his daughter's safety, and the promise of her speedy return.

So the days went by, until, at the close of the tenth, the reindeer halted where the glacier ended in an ice-cliff which descended sheer down hundreds of feet to the water, and Stella gazed around her at a scene such as she had never imagined in her wildest fancies. Before her lay the great waste of waters, blue as the sky overhead, and strewn with icebergs of all shapes and sizes. At the foot of the glacier the sea was clear, but on either side the coast was bordered with pack-ice which stretched away as far as the eye could see, and was crowded with seals and

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walruses. Innumerable sea-birds flew to and fro, or floated on the water, and filled the air with their shrill cries.

Day after day the Princess lingered, unable to tear herself from the strange sights which surrounded her. In vain her foster-mother urged her return, and spoke of the old King's anxiety at her delay. "Nay, good mother," said Stella, "I have sent the tenth messenger to tell him of my safe arrival, and he will not wish to shorten my pleasure if I let another fly to say that all is still well. Let me fill my heart with pictures of the free ocean before I go back to the land of everlasting ice and snow." She shivered as she spoke, and Ursula growled anxiously under her breath as she saw the longing gaze of her nursling towards the southern sky. "Ill will come of it," she grumbled. "The girl is her mother's child, and the King should never have let her leave his side if he wanted her to be happy in his country. I can't say I like the thought of going back myself, if it were not for the child, whom I love better than all my cubs. Yet since it must be, I wish we were safely gone, for I see a storm brewing."

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The storm indeed came speedily, and the Princess, safely sheltered in her wolf-skin tent, trembled as she had never done before at the howling of the gale. The glacier seemed to quake beneath her feet, and at last, after a deafening crash, it heaved and shook with such violence that she was thrown to the ground, and, stunned by the shock, lay senseless until the force of the storm was spent.

When at last she came to herself, she was conscious of a strange rocking motion of the ice beneath her. The noise of the storm had ceased, and she could hear a low, uneasy growling from the bear, who seemed to be prowling round and round outside the tent. She rose with an effort, and, putting aside the tent-flaps, stepped to her foster-mother's side, and gazed around in utter consternation.

The coast lay far behind her, and on its extreme edge she could just discern the gleam of the silver horns of her reindeer ; but the tent, together with herself, old Ursula, and the last ptarmigan with its golden collar, was afloat on a great iceberg that tossed on

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the blue waters of the bay, driven by a wind which bore it further and further from the shore even while she looked.

"What has happened, Ursula, and where are we?" she asked in bewilderment.

"The glacier has calved, as men say, in the storm, and the end on which your tent was pitched has got adrift," said the bear. "If the wind should change soon, we may be driven to shore again; if not——"

"If not—what then?" cried Stella.

"We shall drift south, and as we get into warmer seas the berg which carries us will gradually melt away—if indeed it does not overturn and drown us long before that time comes," she added to herself.

Dumb with fear and amazement Stella stood and watched the shore receding further and further away. Every moment the iceberg tossed and pitched, and threatened to overturn or to crash into one of the huge floating masses that surrounded it, and again and again a sudden gust of wind drove it away from the threatened danger. So often did this happen that, at last, when the berg which bore the Princess had drifted clear of

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the others and was sailing in open water many miles from land, Ursula growled under her breath, "There is magic in it; it is the ruby girdle that saves us. By rights we should have been drowned long ago."

"Shall I send Snowflake to tell my father what has befallen us?" said Stella, stroking the bird that nestled on her shoulder.

"He will know all when your sledge returns home without you," said the bear. "Keep Snowflake to bear him tidings of your safety, if such a time ever comes."

So for many days their icy prison floated southward. Every day Ursula noted with secret fear how it melted and grew smaller in the warmer seas, and how their store of provisions threatened to fail altogether. The day came when their last meal was eaten, and the berg had dwindled until it measured only a few yards each way. The old bear walked to and fro incessantly, growling with helpless rage, and Stella, weary of straining her eyes with looking for the shore that never came in sight, sat with her face hidden on her knees, and so fell into merciful slumber.

She was roused, after hours of uncon-

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sciousness, by a crash and a jarring sensation, and realised, after a moment's bewilderment, that the berg was stranded on a sandy shore which sloped gently upward to a green wooded country, seeming to her unaccustomed eyes like an enchanted dreamland. Climbing down to the beach she wandered slowly on, followed by her faithful guardian, until, forgetting hunger and grief in the new joy of feeling grass beneath her feet and gathering the first flowers she had ever seen, she had left the shore far behind. A low growl from the bear suddenly made her pause, and at the same moment the blast of a horn, ringing out from a thicket near by, filled her with terror.

"What are these, Ursula?" she cried, as strange forms emerged from the trees and rapidly grew near.

"These be men and horses," growled the bear. "Fear not—no horse will come near me." And, indeed, the horses began to plunge and to rear, snorting with fright, until at last one of the riders dismounted, and, throwing his reins to another, approached the Princess on foot, and cap in hand.

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Stella trembled with fear, and understood nothing of what he said ; but the gentle tone and courteous bearing reassured her, and the kind, grave eyes which met her own calmed her fears. She took his proffered hand, and suffered him to lead her to where the horses waited, and to lift her to his empty saddle, walking beside her, while Ursula followed at a safe distance. After a short time the young King—for he it was—pointed forward to a little group of riders who approached, headed by a lady on a black palfrey.

“Mother,” he said, as she drew near. “This is some foreign Princess who has been shipwrecked on our shores, and who does not know our speech.”

The Queen-mother looked compassionately at the lovely girl, in her strange garb of white fur with its ruby girdle, and wonderingly at the gigantic beast who followed her. She spoke a few pitying words, to which Stella replied in her own tongue ; and, to her surprise and joy, was answered, haltingly indeed, but still intelligibly, by the elder lady, who had learned something of the northern speech in her youth. In answer to her

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questions Stella told her story, and thus conversing they rode slowly along, and at last dismounted at the doors of the Queen's Summer Palace. There Stella took from her shoulder the white bird which still nestled there, and kissed it.

"Go, little Snowflake!" she cried. "Tell my father that I live, and am safe, and, if Fate wills, I shall see him again." The bird rose into the air, paused for a moment, and then set off straight as an arrow for the frozen North.

But Stella was never able to keep her promise. The ship which was speedily manned to take her homeward was unable to pass the barriers, which the old King, in his first grief and rage, had built around his kingdom before shutting himself up in his palace, deaf and blind to all that went on in the world. He never knew that his lost daughter was seeking to return, and the approach of winter compelled her to go back to the Southern Kingdom, greatly to the joy of the Queen, to whom she was dear as her own child, and of the King, to whom she had become much more than a sister.

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And so, when time had softened her grief, she became his wife, and was greatly beloved in the pleasant land whose green hills and dales were an ever-growing delight and joy to her.

Only in the frosty nights of winter, when a faint reflection of the Northern Lights flashes in the sky, she still thinks of the old King, sitting grim and lonely in his frozen splendour ; and old Ursula (now grown stiff and feeble) growls and grumbles discontentedly to see in her nurseling's eyes tears, which even the kisses of her own children cannot wholly stay.

The Water Lily

IN the middle of a dense forest was a tiny lake, bordered by a narrow strip of green turf. On one side the lake was fringed with tall reeds; on the other, where the bank was higher, ferns grew down to the water's edge and bent over as if to see their own reflection in the clear surface. Almost in the middle, but nearest to the ferny bank, grew a white water-lily sunning her broad green leaves and shining blossoms in the glow of noon, or rocking gently as the breeze of evening broke up the surface of the water into ripples. The lakelet was far from the abodes of men, and its stillness was only broken by the occasional splash of a waterfowl, or the rustling footfall of a solitary deer that came down every night to the waterside to drink. Whether by night or day the place had a strange, unearthly love-

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liness, and the loveliest thing in it was the water-lily.

It so chanced one afternoon that the King's youngest and best-beloved son hunted with his brothers in the forest, and breaking away as he frequently did from the chase, threw the reins on his horse's neck and suffered it to stray where it would, while he applied himself to the study of a roll of manuscript which he drew from one of his saddle-bags. So absorbed was he in this occupation that he never raised his eyes until the horse stopped suddenly, and he found himself on the margin of the lonely lake. Struck by its beauty he dismounted to explore the place, marvelling greatly that he had never seen it before in his rides, or heard of it from the foresters and wood-cutters.

Before long his eye was caught by the water-lily, and he was seized with a sudden desire for one of its blossoms which just now caught a rosy glow from the setting sun. The water was apparently of no great depth and he waded in for a short distance, but before it reached half-way up his long hunting-boots his feet were caught, apparently by a

strong current which threatened to drag him under. With some difficulty he returned to the bank and, determined not to be baffled walked to the opposite side and stepped in among the reeds. This was even worse, for the wiry stems twisted round his limbs as if endued with life, and when at last he dragged himself free and returned to firm land, he was completely exhausted and breathless. After two or three more vain attempts, the sinking sun warned him to remount and start for home, which he did, trusting to the instinct of his good steed, who threaded his way through the pathless wood until they struck once more on the trail of the hunting party.

All that evening the young prince was pre-occupied and dreamy, but his conduct attracted no attention, for he was of a studious and retiring character. When at last he retired to rest his slumbers were haunted by visions of the white water-lily on the silent lake, and when he awoke it was with the firm resolve to return thither and at any cost to obtain one of the flowers, if not to uproot the whole plant and bring

it to one of the tanks in the palace garden. As soon as he could do so without rousing suspicion, he mounted his horse again and rode off to the forest, following the beaten track as far as it went and then letting the good beast take his way as before, till once more he paused beside the lake. Acting on a plan which had occurred to him as he rode, he tried to force his horse into the water. The horse, however, as soon as his feet touched it showed every symptom of alarm, and resolutely backed away from the brink. Coaxing and soothing it with hand, voice, and rein, he rode at another part of the lakelet, but with equal discomfiture; and on his making a third attempt, it plunged so violently as to throw him to the ground with such force that he lost consciousness.

When he came to himself again the sun was setting, and he looked around for his horse, which was grazing quietly at a little distance. As he endeavoured to walk after it, he found himself so weak and dizzy that he bent down to drink from the lake. As he did so a wild fancy seized him that a laughing face was looking at him from the water, but when he

looked closer there was nothing but his own reflection.

After taking a deep draught of the clear water he was suddenly overpowered with sleep, and lying there among the delicate ferns that fringed the lake he had a strange dream.

He saw the sun set behind the forest, and the stars come out one by one. He felt the swift rush of the bats as they circled round the pool, passing close to his head, and heard the hooting of an owl in the wood behind. Finally the moon rose up high above the lofty trees that had hidden her hitherto, and when her beams fell on the surface of the water it began to rock and swell as if the earth beneath were convulsed. In the very middle seemed to be a foaming whirlpool in which the lily was totally engulfed, and as the last leaf disappeared below the waters a shadowy figure rose in the midst of them and was borne by the waves to the bank where the Prince lay sleeping. Through his half open eyes he saw a tall, slender maiden step upon the bank and pause a few paces from him, finally sinking on one knee as if to see

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him better, until he could dimly distinguish, surrounded by a cloud of dusky hair, a face of such extraordinary beauty, that he murmured to himself, "This is but a dream—if only I need never wake!"

Even as he spoke she rose, and with a sudden backward movement sprang into the water. The waves closed over her, and nothing was to be seen but the water-lily rocking on the troubled lake.

When the Prince woke in the early dawn the horse was standing beside him, rubbing its nose against his cheek as if to ask pardon for having thrown him the night before. Rising he prepared to mount, and as he laid his hand on the horse's mane he saw, for the first time, that he held a half-opened lily-bud.

Then it was no dream! There was no lily growing near the bank from which he could unconsciously have plucked a blossom; of this he was sure, for he had searched carefully the previous day. Should he wait for the night again and see if the vision returned once more? But, meanwhile, what of his parents? Even while he hesitated, with one

foot in the stirrup, the distant blast of a horn assured him that the royal bodyguard were seeking for him ; and springing into the saddle he followed the sound until it brought him to the search party, who accompanied him back to the palace.

The Queen was waiting for him at the doors and accompanied him to his rooms, but though her pallid face and weary eyes spoke of an anxious night, she spoke no word till he had broken his fast. Then she seated herself and motioned him to a stool at her feet.

The Queen was a woman of stately presence, and of great beauty, as yet undimmed by age. All her sons were of more than average height, yet she was taller than any of them ; she came from a far northern land, and her fair hair and blue eyes rendered her strangely conspicuous among the dark-haired southern race, being inherited only by Bevis, the youngest of her sons. Her husband and children regarded her with an almost passionate adoration not unmingled with fear, for at times she had a weird power of reading their most secret thoughts.

Now, as she gazed on Bevis's upturned face, a faint flush came to her cheeks and a dim light to her eyes.

"Have you found the enchanted lake?" she said.

"What do you know of it? Tell me, for dear love's sake, sweet mother!"

"I see another woman's image in your eyes that blurs mine, not blots it out, thank heaven! I see a lily-bud on your bosom, and there is but one spot in this land where the water-lily grows, though in my own dear home they grow on every pool and every slow-running stream. The Lily-maid has laid her weird upon you, my son."

"What do you mean, dear mother? I had a dream and my heart aches yet at the waking, but I know not what it betokens."

"Eighteen years ago," said his mother, "there was great grief in the home of a queen whose sweet hope of a child, after many years of wedlock, had been raised only to be blighted. It was revealed to her wise men that the stork, who was charged to carry the child-soul from the land of the unborn to her arms, had been beguiled to pause by

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the fairy lake, where the child fell from his bill and was borne by the Nixie who dwells there to her home beneath the waters. Another little one came the following year to comfort the bereaved queen, and her grief was forgotten. Only I remembered; and it has been revealed to me since—why, I knew not—that under the water-sprite's care the lost child has grown to maidenhood, and is hidden from mortal gaze in the form of a water-lily. I knew, too, that it was ordained that she would be released by the power of Love: yet till this hour I never guessed that one of my children should be chosen for the deliverer. Tell me your dream, son."

Eagerly the Prince told the chance which led him to the hidden lake, and the events of the night which he had passed beside it; and when he had finished his tale, the Queen remained silent for a space.

"Night brings counsel," she said. "I too must dream ere I know what is best to be done. Is your heart set on rescuing the lake maiden?"

"So much so, dear mother, that if I fail it will surely break. The hours are long and weary till I see her again."

“Come to me when you rise to-morrow morning, son, and I will advise you as best I may. Now go and comfort your father and brothers, who have passed a sleepless night in trouble for you, fearing lest some enemy had fallen on you unawares in the forest. It has not been your wont to absent yourself thus without warning.”

Full of penitence at his thoughtlessness Bevis sought an audience of his father and begged his forgiveness for the anxiety he had caused him, explaining his absence by stating that he had been overtaken by night in the depths of the forest, and had thought it best not to attempt retracing his way till day-break.

The king readily forgave him and his brothers asked no questions, though the elder spoke aside to the younger :

“What has befallen Bevis in this night? Two days ago he was a boy, heedless and dreaming—to-day he is a man of firm speech and assured purpose.”

“It is as you say,” replied the second brother. “The forest is reputed to be the resort of spirits of earth and air—perchance

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one of them has cast a spell over him ; yet not an evil spell, methinks."

The next morning brought a summons for Bevis to attend his mother in her room. He found her gazing at a web of fine lace that was spread over her knees.

"Have you slept well?" she said. "A vigil is before you this night. Are you still resolved to free the enchanted maiden?"

"If it be within the power of mortal man to do so, I am," returned the Prince.

"Then you must watch this night and again to-morrow night beside the lake. I will tell your father that you are absent on my commands and he will be satisfied. To-night, when the moon shines on the lake, the maiden will appear again, and if she approves your purpose will give you a flower three parts blown. When morning comes you must sleep, and not return home, neither must you break your fast ; for another night's watching still is before you. The second night it will be so late before the moon's rays reach the lake that day will dawn while the maiden is laying the full blown lily in your hand. If once the sunlight shines on her

human form the spell is broken. Seize her by the hand therefore, throw this veil over her—it was my own bridal veil, and a charm is woven in the hem—and hold her by might and main till the rising sun shines full into the pool ; and your task is done.”

When Bevis reached the lake that night it was already so dark that, when after unsaddling his horse and turning him loose he sat down by the water's edge, he could scarcely distinguish the white blossoms floating on the still surface. The air was warm and close ; the soft rustling of the trees and the ripple of the water were inexpressibly soothing, and in spite of his endeavours to keep awake he fell asleep at last to be waked by the touch of something cold and wet in his hand. Starting up, for one brief instant he saw the lovely face of his dreams close to his own, but in another moment it had vanished beneath the water with no more sound than a trout might cause in leaping. In his hand lay another lily, nearly open.

Before dawn the rosy tints of dawn crept over the sky, though it was fully another hour before the sun rose above the tree tops.

When it did so, he saw that the water lily had put forth many new blossoms, so that it looked like a great bridal garland floating on the lake, and the sight filled him with fresh hope. He paced up and down the bank longing for night to come once more, and only when the sun showed that noon was passed did he bethink him of his mother's counsel, and lie down to sleep.

When he awoke refreshed and strengthened it was twilight, and no desire for sleep came as the darkness fell and the stars shone out one by one. The summer night was short, but it seemed long as he watched and waited, and the first greyness of dawn was visible in the eastern sky before the moon rose into view. Then, as before, the lake began to heave and swell, and lying down on the grass he feigned sleep. Only when he felt upon his hand the cold stem of the water-lily he started up, and with a sudden motion caught in his own left hand that which held the flower, while with the right he flung the folds of the veil over the beautiful head which bent over him.

The hand which he held lay in his un-

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resistingly, but it was icy cold, and sent a chill to his very heart. The more closely he clasped it the colder he grew, until his arm was numb to the shoulder, and it seemed as if he must loose his grasp. With all the force of his will he held firm, though he felt as if the life-blood was leaving his veins; and so they stood motionless hand in hand until at last the sun rose above the trees, and as his first rays fell on the shrouded maiden she uttered a faint cry and fell lifeless to the ground.

Hastily Bevis drew back the veil and saw with horror that the eyes were closed and the lovely face pallid as in death. His first impulse was to bring water from the lake, but a sudden recollection restrained him, and he contented himself with drawing the lace still further away from her face and neck so that the warm light of the sun could fall full upon her. He then saw that a thin green tendril was coiled round her wrist which seemed to hold her to something beneath the water, and without reflection he broke it from her wrist and threw it aside.

In a few moments he was relieved to

see the colour return to her cheeks, and presently the eyes opened and the lips parted slightly with a sigh. While he stood, abashed, hardly knowing what to do, she rose to her feet, a fair slight maiden with brown hair that fell almost to her ankles over a robe of white gossamer. She held out to him a hand that was warm and human enough now, and he raised it to his lips.

“Why have you brought me from the cold lake, and my cruel lake-mother who yet wished to keep me?” she said, in a low dreamy voice that stirred his heart with strange feelings.

“Because I love you!” he replied simply.

“Love! what does that mean?” she said, laughingly merrily and sweetly; and yet the sound chilled and shocked him.

“It means that I cannot live without you,” he cried passionately.

“My lake-mother told me that I could not live in the warm sun and the fresh air, that I should die if I left the cool water and the deep lake-bed. Yet I am alive, and it seems to me as if I never lived before.”

“Come with me to my own sweet mother

and learn what life truly is," he said. "Leave your old home, lest the waters rise and take you from me again. Come!" and leading her to where his horse stood cropping the grass he saddled him again. She sprang without help to his back, and taking the bridle in his hand the Prince walked beside her all the long journey home.

While they went through the shade of the forest she was strangely silent, shivering now and then and pressing her hand to her heart, but when at last they emerged once more into the light of day she laughed with joy, and began singing to herself softly so that he could not distinguish the words. So like one in a dream he came to the palace gate, where the Queen-mother stood to welcome the stranger.

In a few days, Lily—she would answer to no other name—was quite at home in the palace, where all loved her, yet all felt a strange want in her. To the King and Queen she was dutiful and submissive, to the elder princes gracious and winning, to all others sweet and charming, save only to Bevis. Either she avoided him markedly

and seemed unhappy in his presence, or she would receive him with apparent graciousness and then drive him to despair by her caprice and wilfulness. At times she would reproach him for tearing her away from her home in the pleasant forest; yet with all others she seemed as happy as the day, and never appeared to have a regret for the life she had left.

Only as the days went on and the time of the full moon approached again, she became listless and dreamy, and spent nearly all her time in lonely wanderings, so that the Queen, fearing she hardly knew what, ordered her attendants to watch her closely and stop her if she attempted to leave the palace grounds. In spite of their care, however, she escaped, and on the eve of the full moon was nowhere to be found.

“Ride with all speed to the lake, son,” said the Queen to Bevis. “Unless you bring her back before the moon rises I fear me we may lose her altogether. Take your brothers with you, for the Nixie may not let her go easily.”

In hot haste the three brothers got ready

and rode off to the forest. The way seemed more intricate than ever before, and when they reached the lake the moon was just rising above the trees. On its brink, just where the water was deepest, stood Lily, gazing down into its depths and stretching out her hands as if towards something that was beckoning her thither. Springing from his horse Bevis rushed to her side and caught her in his arms just as she flung herself forward, but the impetus of his rush would have carried both of them into the water if his elder brother, who had followed him closely, had not caught his cloak and dragged him back. The girl struggled, wept, and prayed wildly to be released, but they gently forced her away from the bank and persuaded her to mount behind Bevis, fastening her on for safety's sake with her silken girdle. As they rode back she ceased to cry out, only sobbing softly to herself; and when they drew rein at the palace gate and unfastened the scarf that bound her, she fell fainting into the arms of the eldest Prince.

For many days she lay unconscious, raving at times in delirium, and the Queen tended

her as if she had been her own child, never leaving her except for rest until the danger was past, and partial consciousness returned. Then the Queen went to seek her youngest son, who, forbidden to approach the sick room, had passed weary days and sleepless nights, raging at his powerlessness to help.

"The danger is past, but another task is before you," said the Queen. "First, however, eat and sleep, for you need all your strength."

"I cannot eat or sleep until I hear what is to be done," said Bevis. "Tell me all, and then I will obey you."

"I found from Lily's ravings the charm that drew her back to the pool, and in the same moment I learnt why, with all her beauty and sweetness, she seems something less than human. You released her body from the Nixie's power, but you did not free her soul. The water spirits have no soul, and while Lily shared their nature her human, imperishable soul remained a thing apart, in the shape of a tiny pearl embedded in the roots of the water-lily. When she left the water it was attached to her wrist by

the green stem which you broke—you should have drawn it out ; it still rests at the bottom of the lake, and as long as it is there, so long will Lily return again and again to seek it.”

“ And what can I do, mother, dear ? ”

“ That I will tell you when you have rested well, and I have had time to consider what it would be best to do. To-morrow, when the sun is high, make ready to ride.”

When the next day came, Prince Bevis, refreshed by food and sleep, and still more by good news of his lady-love, sought his mother in her bower. She gave him a coil of what looked like green ribbon.

“ This,” she said, “ is a cord formed of Lily’s silken girdle ; it was the Nixie’s gift, and the water has no power to break it. Slender as the strips are, narrow as a blade of grass, it will serve your purpose better than a ship’s cable. You must reach the lake by mid-day, for then the Nixie is least powerful, yet she will do her best to drown you. Tie one end of this cord round the stem of a tree growing near the bank, fasten the other round your hand, and dive into the water as near to the

spot where the lily grew as you can judge. You will see a huge toad—that is the Nixie herself, and she will strive to hide the pearl from you ; but at any risk you must get it and bring it back. Farewell, make no delay, but bring the precious jewel safe to its owner.”

Once more, and for the last time, Bevis rode off to the fairy lake, and dismounted on its banks. Throwing off his clothing, and attaching the green ribbon as his mother had directed, he dived boldly. The first time he could distinguish nothing but stones and water-weeds, and he was obliged to return to the surface for breath. The second dive showed him a monstrous toad crouching between two stones, and with a tremendous effort he thrust her aside expecting to find the pearl beneath her, but it was not there. Returning to breath once more, he paused to reflect before the third dive, which he felt instinctively would be his last, where would the creature be most likely to hide the jewel? A sudden inspiration answered—in her mouth.

Once again he dived, and seizing the

reptile by the back forced it to open its jaws. There, indeed, lay the pearl, and in an instant he had snatched it out and risen with his prize. But the water tossed and surged, an invisible force seemed to be dragging him down, and he dared not catch at the cord with his free hand for fear of losing the pearl. After a moment's perplexity it occurred to him to place it between his lips and there hold it while slowly and painfully he dragged himself back to the bank.

For some time he lay exhausted and breathless, but at last resumed his apparel and his horse, guarding the prize in an inner pocket of his doublet. Slowly and wearily he rode home, yet feeling an entire sense of peace and contentment such as he had never known since the day when he first found the hidden lake. When he reached his home he entered almost unnoticed, and made his way to the Queen's room only to find it empty. He sought in vain for one of her waiting-women, and at last betook himself to the door of Lily's room, where he found a little group of ladies, some weeping, all wearing a sad and downcast air.

"The Princess!" he cried. "Tell me, is she worse? Is she dead?"

"Not dead, but dying," answered one. "Only a miracle can save her life, the physicians say."

"Then in heaven's name let me enter," cried Bevis, and as he spoke the door opened and the Queen appeared.

She questioned him with a look, and he answered by laying the pearl in her hand.

"Just in time," she whispered, and beckoning him to follow re-entered the sick room.

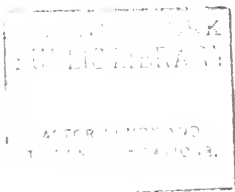
There lay the Lily-maiden, white as the flower whose semblance she had borne for so long, and apparently lifeless. Bevis uttered a low cry of despair and grief; but his mother, without heeding him, paused only to fold the pearl securely in a linen fillet and bind it round the girl's head.

Instantly a soft colour flushed into her cheeks, her lips parted with a smile, and in another minute she sat upright glowing with restored health and beauty. Her eyes met those of the young Prince with a new look, which made his heart stop for an instant and then throb again with tumultuous joy, as he

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fell on one knee and gently kissed the hand which she impulsively extended to him. The Lily-maiden was human at last.

A month later, a great festival was held to commemorate the wedding of Prince Bevis with Princess Lily. His chief bridal gift to her was a bracelet of emeralds, its central ornament being a water-lily cut from one great diamond, in the middle of which was firmly embedded the magic pearl. The bracelet was fitted carefully to her wrist and secured by a lock, the key of which the Prince dropped into the sea during the wedding voyage. So unless some one finds it again, it is not likely that the Princess will ever resume the form of a white water-lily.





PRINCESS ZORA HAULS DOWN HER FLAG

The Pirate Princess

THERE was once a certain King who had seven daughters and no sons. This was no grief to him, for he said : " Sons are so much trouble. As soon as they grow up they get into debt, or gamble, or take to drink, or make low marriages, or sing music-hall songs. Now, girls do none of these things " (this happened many years ago), " and you can make them just as useful if you go the right way to work."

And so he proceeded to educate the Princesses just as if they had been Princes. Each had a definite career marked out for her as soon as she attained the age of five years, or even earlier, and all her up-bringing tended to fit her for that career. There was, as we shall presently see, one exception, and only one, to the rule.

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The names of the Princesses were as follows: Aura, Cora, Dora, Flora, Laura, Nora, and Zora. The similarity of these names may seem to show a certain lack of imagination on the part of their parents, but they had the advantage of being in alphabetical order, so that their relative rank in the family could be ascertained at a glance. Except Princess Zora, who was fully five years younger than Nora, each was exactly eighteen months younger than the next eldest, so there was never any difficulty, when you knew the age of one, in calculating the ages of the rest. According to their seniority their path in life was determined.

Princess Aura, being the eldest, was of course the heir apparent. While still in the nursery she learnt to speak four different languages; in the schoolroom she learnt several more. A distinguished professor of elocution and a member of Parliament trained her in the art of public speaking; an eminent diplomatist taught her to cultivate the faculty of saying pleasant things to every one, without committing herself to anything; and the head of the College of Heralds instructed her

in genealogies and the Table of Precedence. At the age of fifteen she laid her first foundation stone, and from that time forth appeared occasionally in public until she was nineteen, when she was considered "out," and was launched into the full swing of Court life. At twenty-one she married the younger son of a neighbouring King, whose alliance was of the greatest importance to the realm, and here for the present we may leave her.

Princess Cora was to be Commander-in-Chief of the Army. As soon as she was old enough to leave the nursery her education was entrusted to an old general, who instructed her in military tactics, international law, and chess; and to a retired sergeant, who drilled her, and taught her gymnastics, riding, and rifle-shooting. At ten years old she received her first commission, and by the time she came of age she was a General, and fully qualified to assume the rank of Commander-in-Chief whenever it should fall vacant. Under her patronage a corps of rifle-women was formed, for which the Queen herself designed a uniform, which was at once absolutely rational and extremely

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artistic and becoming. I cannot describe it, for I never saw it.

Dora was Admiral of the Fleet. While still an infant in arms she was taken every day for a short cruise, in all weathers ; she slept in a hammock as soon as she left her cradle, and manœuvred tiny fleets of walnut shells in her bath at an age when other children are nursing rag dolls. When she was thirteen a specially-built training-ship, named the *Thetis*, was fitted out for her benefit, and that of twenty selected noble-men's daughters of her own age ; the difference between this and modern training-ships being that instead of remaining in harbour she made long coasting voyages, with the object of teaching the Princess both the practical working of the vessel and also—an important matter—the geography of all the neighbouring coasts. At eighteen she had reached the rank of Captain, and was made Admiral as soon as she came of age, her flagship being manned entirely by noblemen's sons, except as regards the officers, who were all girls. Needless to state, it was a most well-regulated ship.

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Flora was Lord Chancellor, Laura Minister of Public Education, and Nora Minister of Public Health and Amusement. All had the same good general education up to the age of fourteen, when Flora was consigned to the governance of an eminent barrister to read law ; Laura was sent to a foreign university which admitted women, returning at nineteen to found a Women's University in her own country ; and Nora began a severe medical and surgical training, with intervals of cricket, tennis, golf, and gymnastics. Each in turn fulfilled all her father's expectations, and when Flora had ascended the woolsack, Laura had introduced a new Education Code, and Nora signalled her entrance into office by opening a public playground and gymnasium in every large city in the kingdom, his Majesty suddenly woke up to the fact that Princess Zora was now sixteen years of age and had received no systematic education at all. No one had ever looked upon her as anything but a baby ; no governess or governor had ever been appointed for her, no career allotted to her, and she still remained under the thralldom of the old nurse

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who, having had one Princess after another taken from her authority in turn, lavished as much affection and tyranny on the one remaining as should have sufficed for all seven.

“My dear, what *is* to be done with Zora?” said the King in perplexity to his wife, when this state of affairs dawned on him. “What has she been doing all these years?”

“You know I never interfere with the education of the children,” said the Queen; “it takes me all my time to see them properly fed and clothed. I never was intellectual, or I should not have married you. I mean, of course,” she added hastily, seeing a cloud on the Royal brow, “you have intellect enough for both. As to what has been done with her in past years you must ask her sisters. *My* opinion is, she has been spoilt. She has been in the habit lately of spending three months alternately with each, as far as I know.”

“I think we had better call a Family Council, and consult with her sisters,” said the King, and accordingly as soon as Cora returned from her campaign, and Dora’s flagship was signalled in port, this was done.

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The Princesses all assembled in the Council Chamber, and the King took the chair, while the Queen sat on one side of him, and Zora threw herself on a rug at Aura's feet.

"You all know the object of this meeting," began the King. "It is—she is—in fact, *here* she is! and now I ask you, what is to be done with her?"

"Of course we all knew she was getting no regular education," said Princess Aura, "but we like to have her a child. I thought, perhaps, I might employ her as my private secretary, if she *must* do something. Only I can't have her spending *more* than six hours a day in the nursery—it demoralises the children."

"I was hoping to have her as one of my aides-de-camp," said General Cora. "I would take care she didn't get shot."

"She has been to sea with me several times," said Admiral Dora. "She is too old for the Navy, but you *might* put her into the Merchant Service. Or better still, make her First Lord of the Admiralty."

"Make her a ward in Chancery," suggested Flora.

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"There are several open Scholarships in my University," murmured Laura, absently fitting her mortarboard on Zora's head, and Nora said decisively, "Let her take the Department of Public Amusement off my hands. I've quite enough to do without it."

"Well, Zora," said the King, "you have heard your sisters' opinion; what is your own?"

Princess Zora stood up, drew herself to her full height of 5 ft. nothing, "still growing," and said: "I want to go out into the world to seek my fortune."

"My goodness! what does the child mean?" gasped the Queen, while the King took off his spectacles, wiped them, and then put them on again to behold more clearly the audacious damsel.

"I am the youngest," said Zora. "In the story-books it is always the youngest son who goes out to seek his fortune, and comes home richer and grander than all the rest. I don't see why I shouldn't have my rights because I am a girl and not a boy. I am quite old enough to take care of myself," she added, with a vindictive glance at the old nurse, who

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had entered unasked, and taken a seat where she thought herself unseen.

"This Council is adjourned for six months," said the King. "Meantime, daughter, you will perhaps reconsider the subject, and endeavour to arrive at a less vague and romantic idea of a future career." And the Council broke up, Zora linking her arm in Aura's, and going off with her to visit the little nephew and niece who were the idols of her heart.

At the time appointed the family met again, and Zora was once more called to answer for herself.

"Have you considered the matter of which we spoke six months ago, Zora?" asked her father.

"Yes," said Zora. "I've made up my mind."

"To what, then?"

"To be a Pirate," said Zora, calmly.

"Did I understand you to say a Pirate?" asked her father, looking utterly bewildered.

"Yes, a Pirate," said Zora. "It is the only profession left for women now which is not over-crowded, and I am resolved to strike out a new line."

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“What do you think, Aura, and you, Cora and Dora?” said the King, turning to his three elder daughters for advice, as he usually did when in a difficulty.

“Let her please herself, it will do her no harm,” said Aura.

“Yes, let her learn by experience,” added Cora.

“Let her be a Pirate by all means,” laughed Admiral Dora. “She can’t do much mischief.”

The King turned his eyes despairingly on Flora, Nora, and Laura, who all cried out with one voice, “Let her try, by all means!” Then there was a dead silence for a few minutes, broken at last by the Queen.

“I insist upon one thing—or rather two things—if this mad scheme is to take effect. She must have a thoroughly experienced man to teach her her business, and she must not go to sea without a proper chaperone—in a bonnet.”

“That is only reasonable,” said the King. “You, Dora, will perhaps see to the first. As to the chaperone, that will be easy; a superannuated Maid of Honour will be just

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the thing. For myself, I will see to a proper ship being built and provisioned ; but I do hope, Zora, you will be steady, and not get into mischief. I never thought I should live to see one of my daughters a Pirate ; but there, girls will be girls. Have your own way, and don't break my spectacles," he added hastily, as Zora flung her arms round his neck and kissed him ecstatically, and the rest of the Princesses went off quietly to hold a Private Council of their own, for they had no notion of letting their little sister get any harm from her vagaries.

Next day, the following advertisement appeared in the "Court Circular and Palace Mercury :"

"Wanted, a respectable and experienced Pirate, not less than forty-five years of age ; must be thoroughly conversant with his profession, and able to teach it to a beginner. Character required.—Apply personally at the Palace, between the hours of 5 and 7 P.M. N.B.—Abstainer preferred."

This notice appeared daily for a week without attracting any applicants, all the professional pirates then ashore suspecting a trap to bring them into the clutches of the law. On the eighth day, however, a weather-

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beaten, one-eyed individual presented himself as a candidate for the post of piratical instructor. His name was Binks. He produced unimpeachable testimonials, and as he asserted that he had been five times a widower, there could be no doubt as to his respectability. His appearance was not prepossessing, but that, in the eyes of the Queen, was an additional recommendation. The only difficulty that presented itself was the abstinence question. He said that by the rules of the International Freebooters' Union he was obliged to take a glass of grog daily, and a double ration on the Queen's birthday, and that if he broke the regulation the freedom of the high seas would be denied him. Finally, the matter was allowed to rest, and he was appointed first mate of the *Hippolyta*, the fine vessel of which the skeleton had just been put together in the ship-yard. The rest of the officers were ladies, selected from among Dora's former messmates.

While it was building, Zora was very busy in embroidering a black silk banner with a lovely skull and crossbones from a strictly anatomical design furnished by Nora, and in

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consulting the Mistress of the Robes and the Court Dressmaker as to her nautical outfit. The result of their deliberations was a charming "Corsaire" costume, comprising a short kilted skirt, striped black and red ; a red silk jersey with the ship's name and the skull and crossbones woven into it in black ; an open black reefer jacket with lots of silver buttons, each bearing a skull instead of an anchor ; a red silk nightcap, with a peak that hung jauntily over one ear, red stockings, and black shoes with silver buckles. The effect was so bewitching that a sumptuary law had to be passed, forbidding the adoption of a similar dress by any lady not professionally entitled to wear it.

All the preparations were at last completed, and the *Hippolyta* sailed out of harbour one fine summer morning, while the King, Queen, and the six Princesses stood on the cliffs watching her as long as the top-masts were visible. Then the Queen turned with a sigh to her second daughter, and said :

"You're sure it is all right, Dora?"

"Quite right," answered the Admiral,

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cheerfully, "I have taken every precaution." So saying she led the way homeward.

For several weeks the voyage of the *Hippolyta* was prosperous and uninterrupted. Binks, who had had his instructions, directed the ship's course: the weather was fair, the Captain strolled up and down the deck surveying the horizon through a big telescope; the officers played "Halma" between the watches, or sat in groups polishing their silver buttons with plate-powder, and the chaperone reclined in a deck-chair beneath an awning, knitting grey worsted stockings for the deserving poor. The only drawback to Zora's perfect enjoyment was the absence of excitement. How was it that the high seas were so completely deserted? If ever a strange sail hove in sight it invariably disappeared before they could get anywhere near it, and, when at last a small vessel approached within speaking distance, it proved to have yellow fever on board, and the chaperone insisted on crowding all sail to get away from it, and having the decks sprinkled with carbolic.

Zora could not be expected to know that

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the sea had been scoured in all directions by Dora's gunboats, warning all vessels off the course to be pursued by the pirate ship. Under these conditions the *Hippolyta* might have circumnavigated the globe without adventure, had it not been for a sudden hurricane which, besides compelling the chaperone to seek for several days the privacy of her cabin, drove the ship considerably out of the course mapped out for her, and brought her into a non-frequented track.

The very morning after the cessation of the storm, Zora's eyes, as she ascended the bridge, were gratified by the sight of a merchant ship, much disabled by the storm, making useless endeavours to put as much space as possible between herself and the terrible black flag.

The Princess's acquaintance with romances of the sea had taught her the correct course for a pirate to pursue. Accordingly she ordered the decks to be cleared for action, and commanded the gunner to fire a shot across the bows of the helpless craft, which immediately lowered her colours in token of surrender, and was boarded by a boatful of

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the *Hippolyta's* men under the command of the second mate.

Overjoyed at her easy victory Zora inquired of the confidential Binks what was to be the next proceeding. By his directions the crew of the prize was transhipped and replaced by picked men from the pirate vessel; but this, he explained, was only a temporary measure. The correct course to pursue, according to Binks, was to remove all the more valuable parts of the cargo, scuttle the ship, and then make the prisoners walk the plank.

"Walk the plank? What's that?" said Zora, whose nautical education was still incomplete.

"Send 'em to Davy Jones's locker," growled Binks, who had evidently chosen to consider the capture of a prize as an event to be commemorated in the same manner as the Queen's birthday.

"Davy Jones' locker!" said the Princess. "Why, you must mean drown them!"

"That's about it," said Binks. "See Article 27 of the Code of the International Freebooters' Union."

"But I'm not a member of the Union," said Zora, "and I won't have any one drowned. What harm have they done me that I should have them murdered?"

"Oh, if you're going to let trifles of that sort stand in the way of your plain dooty, you ain't no pirate, that's all. Call this a pirate ship! Blest if it ain't more like a drawing-room!" said Binks with a disgusted sniff.

"Do you command this ship or do I?" said Zora, stamping with fury. "Be off, and take charge of the prize, and let the second officer come back; and don't let me see you again till I send for you, or I'll have you put in irons as a mutineer."

Binks accordingly went off growling, and the pirate captain, accompanied by her chaperone, went down to inspect the prisoners, who were so overpowered by the unusual aspect of this terrific buccaneer that they quite forgot to fall on their knees and beg for mercy in the correct manner. Instead, they all stood speechless, staring with open mouths at the dainty little figure as she passed down their ranks, followed by the chaperone in her most imposing bonnet. Last in the row

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stood a handsome young sailor who did not appear to be more than nineteen years old at most, and whose face, as he gazed at Zora in respectful admiration, struck her with an odd sense of familiarity.

As she returned to the deck after satisfying herself as to the comfort of the prisoners—surely an unusual proceeding for a pirate!—she could not help turning to the chaperone and saying, “How good-looking that young sailor is!”

“My dear! a common sailor!!” said the chaperone, horrified.

Next morning another surprise was in store for Zora. The prize had vanished, and with her the whole of the *Hippolyta's* crew, her guns, and her black flag. Binks, dissatisfied with Zora's novel method of treating her captives, had persuaded all the seamen to join him and sail off in the prize to do a little piracy on their own account. No one was left behind except the Princess, her chaperone, her officers, the cabin girl, and the prisoners.

What was to be done? The second mate was quite capable of navigating the ship; but, even with the assistance of the midshipmaids,

the other mates were hardly equal to the work involved in keeping her going. Clearly there was only one thing to do—to offer the prisoners their liberty on condition of their supplying the places of the missing crew. This was done, and the *Hippolyta* was speedily manned again. But what is a pirate ship without her guns or her black flag! Zora was reluctantly compelled to renounce for the present all idea of future glory, and give orders for the homeward voyage.

It was not, however, to be accomplished without excitement and that of a not altogether pleasant nature. Before half the distance had been covered, a large man-of-war was one day seen to be bearing down on the *Hippolyta*, flying the colours of a State which had for some time been hostile to Zora's own country, and with which war had been declared since her departure. Of this she was not aware until rendered so by a peremptory summons to surrender, with which, having no guns, she had no choice but to comply. With her own hand she hauled down the national flag which had replaced her beautiful skull and cross-bones, and, as

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she watched the foreign ship lowering boats to board her, she burst into tears of disappointment and mortification.

She soon, however, collected herself, and, summoning her officers round her, stood prepared to receive the invaders with becoming dignity.

To her astonishment, however, the young sailor who had previously attracted her notice, advanced to meet the first boat's crew as they appeared on the deck, and to her still greater astonishment she saw the officer in command greet him with every appearance of surprise and respect. Presently they turned and came towards her, and the sailor, bowing low, addressed her thus :

“ I regret extremely, dear Madam, that one of my father's ships should have caused you so much alarm and inconvenience.”

“ Your father ! Who is your father ? ”

“ I must apologise for having accepted your kindness under a false name. I am Rollo, the youngest son of the King of Westland, with whom, as I have just learned to my great regret, your father is at war. But when I return home, as I purpose doing on

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the ship yonder, I hope, that in consideration of the service you have rendered me, he will do all in his power to bring about a peace."

"But I do not understand how I came to find you among the crew of a merchant vessel," said Zora, who understood now why his face had struck her as familiar, he having at one time visited her own father's Court.

With some hesitation, the young Prince explained.

"I had a great desire to be a sailor, and at the age of fourteen, as my parents would not hear of it, I ran away to sea."

"Why, that's just like me!" cried Zora, suddenly forgetting her dignity. "At least, I didn't run away, because I had no need to. But I think I've had enough of it."

"So have I," said the Prince confidentially, also forgetting his grown-up manners. "But then I've had heaps of ups and downs, and I never had the luck to be a pirate. It must have been an awful lark," and he looked round enviously at the beautiful ship, and appreciatively at the fair bevy of officers with the pretty Captain at their head.

"It's all right for a time, but when it comes

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to drowning prisoners!" said Zora, with a shiver.

"Well, it's been good luck for me to fall in with you. Thanks for your hospitality, and I hope we shall soon meet again."

"Not on the high seas," said the Princess, shaking her head gravely. "I'm going home to be a good girl, and train for the post of Minister of Public Amusement."

After a regretful farewell the young Prince left the ship, and Zora proceeded on her homeward voyage without any more adventures. Needless to say she was received by her parents with the warmest of welcomes, which did not diminish when she solemnly announced that a piratical career did not equal her expectations, and she was resolved to begin a systematic course of work at home.

Accordingly, with the help of Nora, she laid out a plan of education which, if carried out, would have extended over ten years at least. Before three months were over, however, an Ambassador arrived from the King of Westland, with proposals of a nature somewhat startling to the parents, who still looked

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on their youngest daughter, despite her unusual experiences, as a child. They were as follows :

1. That a contract of marriage be entered into between Prince Rollo and Princess Zora, the marriage to take place when the young Prince attained the age of twenty-one years.
2. That the island which was the source of disagreement between the kingdoms should be settled on the young couple, and that they should enter into possession of it immediately on their marriage.

The Family Council being once more convened, again gave it as their opinion that Zora should be allowed to please herself ; and, with her approval, a compromise was arrived at, by which Prince Rollo was allowed to visit the Court and plead his cause in person. This he did so successfully that on his departure Zora laid out an entirely new scheme of education for the years intervening before her marriage, in accordance with which all her sisters took part in the training of the

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future Queen. Unlike the former plans, this was successfully carried out, and at the time appointed the happy pair took possession of their island kingdom.

Their reign was long, happy, and uneventful, and signalised only by the extreme interest which both showed in their navy, and the especial care of the young Queen to repress piracy.



"HOW MANY STRAWS GO TO A GOOSE'S NEST?"

The Turkey-Girl

“ONCE upon a time, and a very good time it was, though it wasn’t in my time, or your time, or any one else’s time that ever I heard tell of,” there stood a little cottage in the middle of a wide common, where lived an old henwife and a young girl supposed to be her grand-daughter. You will, of course, be prepared to hear that they were really a Princess and her Fairy God-mother ; but no one knew it, and the maiden Amaryllis herself suspected it least of all. She could not remember any home but the pretty cottage overgrown with roses and honeysuckle that blossomed all the year round, nor any relative but the old henwife ; and, living as she did apart from the world, it never seemed to her strange that the old bent woman in the russet gown could give her such an education that by the time she

was eighteen she was the wisest woman in all the known world.

Somehow, I really cannot tell how, the fame of her wonderful learning spread among the villages round, and from the villages to the towns, till at last people would come from all parts of the kingdom to ask her advice and help; and on bright days a continual stream of finely-dressed folk might be seen passing over the common and through the enclosure, where she sat on a daisy bank, knitting and minding her grandmother's turkeys. Why people came to her instead of to the old fairy, who of course was wiser still, I can't say; but nobody did, unless it were the farmers' wives around, who when anything ailed their pigs and poultry would ask the henwife's advice, and take it or leave it according as it agreed with their own opinion or not—as is the way of women in that country.

It happened one July day that Amaryllis had been sitting in the field, watching her turkeys and giving advice to all comers, for many hours; and, good-natured creature as she was, was getting very tired and a trifle

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bored. It was customary for her callers to enter by one gate, where the big turkey cock stood on guard, and leave it by another, three minutes being the time allowed for each interview. Now, as she looked at the first gate, she saw that only three people remained, of whom one was just entering.

He was an old, old man in flowing robes and a long white beard, being in fact the Court Mathematician. He held in one hand a roll of parchment, on which he had inscribed a list of problems supposed incapable of solution. As he paused in front of Amaryllis he cleared his throat, settled his black-rimmed spectacles on his nose, and read the first question on his list. "How many straws go to a goose's nest?"

The turkey-girl looked up from the heel of the long blue stocking that she was knitting, and said, "Not one, for straws cannot go anywhere—they have to be carried."

"Thanks, awfully," said the Mathematician, making a hasty note on the edge of his parchment; and then turning to the next question, "If a herring and a half—ow!" as a sharp peck on the leg from the turkey-cock re-

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minded him that the time was up, and he must make room for the next comer. He hurried off with more haste than dignity, and his place was filled by a very different person.

This was a tall and handsome young man with curling black hair and brown eyes, dressed in a blue velvet cloak lined with ermine, over doublet and hose of white velvet slashed with blue silk, his cap being blue velvet with a long white plume. It was a hot day, as I said, and all this finery was extremely oppressive; but he was a Prince, and "Noblesse oblige"—or, as his old nurse had put it, "Pride must abide." He was the Heir Apparent, and a very important personage; but being a public school boy he had learnt to write and spell every dead language and no living ones, not even his own. So he had come to inquire of the learned turkey-girl the proper way of spelling "unparalleled," for his pocket dictionary did not give past participles.

He approached with a low bow, and began, "Might I beg the favour——" when Amaryllis looked up suddenly and met his eyes. I do

not think I mentioned before that she was extremely beautiful. Her complexion was like lilies and roses, her long hair (partly covered by a big straw hat of her own plaiting, wreathed with cornflowers) was like spun gold, and her eyes—ah! I can't tell you what her eyes were like any more than the Heir Apparent could have done, as he gasped for breath and stood dumb for a whole minute. Then he fell on his knees, clasped his hands, and cried, "Be mine, lovely maiden! I lay my kingdom at your feet—deign to share it! Make me the happiest man in the world, and say that——"

"Time! Next, please," said Amaryllis, who had gone back to her knitting on perceiving that she had dropped a stitch. It was no use pleading for a further hearing; the turkey-cock advanced with such threatening demonstrations that the Heir Apparent had to pick up his hat and retreat hastily. So he got no answer at all, which was hard, but I daresay it did him good to get a rebuff—at all events, it was a new experience.

The last visitor was a widower with thirteen children, who wanted to know the best way

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of keeping a baby from sucking its thumb. The turkey-girl considered the question for a moment, and then said, "Why *shouldn't* the baby suck its thumb?" The consequence of which answer, or rather question, was that the baby was allowed to suck his thumb as much as ever he liked in future, and lived happy ever after—but that is another story.

Meanwhile the Heir Apparent (whose name was Daphnis) went slowly and sadly home, trying to find solace for his wounded heart in composing poetry to the praise of Amaryllis; but alas! the only word he could think of to describe her charms adequately was "unparalleled," and he could not spell it; so he had to express himself in Greek hexameters, which, though classically beautiful, were not soul-satisfying. Consequently, by the time he reached home he was more miserable than ever.

As soon as he entered the Palace he sought his mother, and found her in her boudoir.

"Mother, dear," he began, "I want to get married."

"Mercy on us! Who to? I mean, to

whom?" said her Majesty—who had learnt grammar.

"The turkey-girl on the common," said Daphnis, preparing to meet objections with defiance. But it was not needed; for the Queen, dropping her book and her spectacles, and exclaiming, "Dear, dear! how very awkward!" trotted off to return with the King. She made him sit down by her on the sofa, and then said, all in a breath, "Daphnis wants to get married—and to a turkey-girl!"

"How extremely inconvenient," said the King, rubbing his nose, as his custom was when perplexed. "Most embarrassing, in fact. I hope you haven't committed yourself in any way, Daphnis?"

"Well, I've asked her to have me, and she would not listen," replied his son. "But what do you mean by saying it's awkward and inconvenient, and all the rest of it? I am twenty-one; am I never to marry?"

"It's not that," said the Queen, appearing much distressed; "but the fact is——" She looked at the King.

"The fact is——" said he, and looked at her.

“Well!” said the Prince. “The fact is—what?”

“You are married already!” they exclaimed in unison.

“And if you marry any one else it will be bigamy,” added the Queen as a corollary.

“It would be a serious thing if the Heir Apparent were to break the law like that,” said the King, reflectively. “Why, it might even lead to a change of Government.”

“But what do you mean by bigamy, and my being married already?” asked Daphnis, getting more and more bewildered. “What business had any one to marry me without asking my permission? A most unpardonable liberty, I call it.”

“You knew all about it at the time, and liked it well enough,” said the Queen. “You were four years old on your wedding day, and your bride just ten months. I remember you made yourself sick with ices and bride-cake, and I had to give you Gregory powder next day.”

“I remember!” cried the Prince. “Sweet and sad recollection! But where and who is my bride? Why was I kept in ignorance,

and not given the opportunity of repudiating or confirming the match, according to law, when I came of age ? ”

“ That is just the rub,” said the King, distractedly suiting the action to the word. “ Your wife is Dorinda, daughter and heiress of the King of Cathay. Two months after the wedding a revolution took place in Cathay—the King was murdered, the Queen soon after died of grief, and the baby Princess has never been heard of from that day to this.”

“ Perhaps she is dead too ? ” hopefully suggested the heartless young husband.

“ No,” said his mother. “ The Court Magician makes investigations from time to time, and all he can tell us is that she still lives. I will cause him to be summoned now, and you shall hear the latest intelligence.”

The Court Magician, however, was engaged in interviewing an Arabian Djinn, who had just paid him a visit, and only sent the following message : “ If the Prince will find his bride, let him ride alone due north.”

“ I don't *want* to find her,” said Daphnis.

“ But if you wish to annul your marriage you must get her consent,” said the King, “ and very likely she wants you even less than you want her.”

There was something in this argument, and accordingly next morning Daphnis mounted his strongest steed, filled his saddle bags with food and his purse with money, and rode off as directed due north. The way led straight past the cottage of the henwife, and he was amazed to see that it was completely deserted. Henwife, turkey-girl, turkeys, pigs, cows, and poultry—all had vanished, and only a ball of blue yarn, lying on the bank, remained to tell of Amaryllis. This the Prince kissed with fervour, and put it in the pocket next his heart.

For seven days he continued to ride, putting up every night at some town or village on his way, and inquiring everywhere if a Princess called Dorinda had been seen thereabouts. Everywhere he received the same answer, “ No ; but a girl driving a flock of turkeys passed through yesterday.”

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Could this be Amaryllis? and whether or no, how could any girl, he thought, walk so fast as to keep always ahead of his horse?

On the eighth morning he found himself on the skirts of an apparently impenetrable forest, and paused in bewilderment, for it seemed as if he must needs turn to east or west.

Suddenly the ball of yarn jumped out of his pocket and began to unroll on the ground before him. Following the thread he discovered a narrow bridle-path which just allowed the passage of his horse. As he proceeded the forest grew denser and darker, and the thread glowed like a line of fire as it wound in and out among the trees. For many hours he followed this strange guide, and when at last he emerged again into the light it was evening, and the setting sun shone on the golden pinnacles of a great city which lay about half a mile away.

As he approached it slowly on his jaded horse sounds of rejoicing met his ear. Bells clashed, guns thundered, and contin-

uous cheering followed every salute. The great gates were open and unguarded, and entering unobserved he found himself in the centre of a crowd who were thronging towards the main thoroughfare of the city.

"What city is this, and what is the cause of all this commotion?" he asked of a mounted official, who was employed in keeping order among the people.

"This is the capital of Cathay," was the reply, "and we are gathering to offer a public welcome to Dorinda, our Queen, who returned to us yesterday after an absence of seventeen years. The usurping King died a month ago, and no one knew where the true Queen was; but the powerful fairy who has protected her sent to announce that she was coming, and the token by which we should recognise her was—here she comes!" and a great roar of applause burst forth as a company of soldiers in silver helmets and breastplates rode down the street, clearing the way for a magnificent procession which followed.

Daphnis sat spell-bound, as soldiers, musi-

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cians, nobles, Court ladies, and civic dignitaries passed by in succession, till at length a cry of "The Queen! the Queen! long live Queen Dorinda!" caused him to turn his eyes to the ivory chariot, drawn by six black horses, which came slowly down the street, preceded by—strange to say—a flock of turkeys, all strutting in time to the music. He scarcely noticed them, for his attention was riveted on the slight, stately figure, robed in ermine and crowned with brilliants, reclining on the velvet cushions, and bowing left and right in response to the rapturous greeting of the people. This, then, must be his wife.

As the chariot passed before him she turned, and her eyes met his. Instantly he sprang from his horse and rushed to throw himself at her feet. It was Amaryllis!

She stopped the horses and motioned him to take his place by her side. "I was expecting you," she said, and signed to the heralds, and immediately they trumpeted, proclaiming in the silence which followed, "Welcome to Daphnis, the Queen's Consort!" A double salute was fired, the bells

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pealed again, and, amid the cries of rejoicing which followed, the chariot moved on.

"Am I dreaming?" said the Prince to his lovely companion. "Or is it true, and are you indeed my long-lost bride?"

"It is true," she said, with a charming blush, "though I did not know it myself when we met before."

"How did you find it out?" he asked, "and why have we been parted so long?"

"So long as the usurper reigned my Fairy Godmother found it safest to keep me concealed," said Dorinda, or Amaryllis as she still preferred to be called. "A week ago she told me all, and bade me journey hither to claim my vacant throne. The people had been told that their Queen would return to them on foot driving a flock of turkeys, so when I arrived last night they were expecting me."

"Well, but tell me how you got here before me, seeing that I rode and you walked?"

"My turkeys are very strong on the wing," said Amaryllis; "during the night they carried me in a hammock while I slept. I knew you were following, and even now

I was on my way to meet you at the gates."

"If only my parents could know!" cried Daphnis.

"They do know, and are only a few hours' journey behind," said Amaryllis. "My god-mother told me they would arrive in time for our second wedding and joint coronation to-morrow," she added, blushing again more charmingly than ever.

"A second wedding! Is that necessary?" exclaimed the Prince.

"Well, not if you prefer to repudiate the marriage," she retorted. "It rests with you to do so if you wish."

"My angel!" exclaimed Daphnis, and said no more.

"So they were married, and lived happily ever after," as the old fairy-tales say. A new and more direct road was opened between the two capitals to allow of constant visits to the old King and Queen, and in course of time the kingdoms were united under the wise rule of Daphnis and Dorinda. As for the turkeys, they all received Government pensions, and grew fat on corn and chestnuts

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till they died of apoplexy. No turkey was ever killed in that happy country, for the Queen decreed that the turkey should henceforth be held sacred in memory of the days when she was Amaryllis, the Turkey-girl.

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